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WEST IS WEST

EUGENE MANLOVE RHODES

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THE NEIGHBOR STARS BENT LOW TO KISS THE HILLS

WEST IS WEST

BY

EUGENE MANLOVE RHODES

AUTHOR OF

"GOOD MEN AND TRUE,"
"THE DESIRE OF THE MOTH," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
HARVEY DUNN

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PS3535
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MAIN

"Morning on the Malibu
where once we used to ride."

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CONTENTS

PROLOGUE

Chapter		Page
I.	The Keeper of the Gates	11
II.	Beyond the Desert	13
III.	Pictured Rock	20
IV.	Good-By	28
V.	Skullspring	32
VI.	No Dwelling More on Sea or Shore	39

ONCE UPON A TIME

I.	The Long Shift	43
II.	Cheerful Land	54
III.	Malibu Flat	66
IV.	Barnaby Bright	77
V.	Fuentes	93
VI.	Pursuit of Happiness	101

THE SPRING DRIVE

VII.	Return of the Native	109
VIII.	The Shipping Pens	116
IX.	"Above All Wisdom and All Subtlety"	121
X.	The Cutting Ground	126
XI.	The Night Guard	132
XII.	Bell-the-Cat	136

THE FOOL'S HEART

XIII.	Double-Dare	145
XIV.	Chicken-Hearted	151
XV.	A Knocking at the Gate	155
XVI.	The Traitor	160
XVII.	Keough Opens a Door	164

CROOKNOSE

Chapter		Page
XVIII.	Pass of the North	169
XIX.	The Dream-Shop	173
XX.	Chips That Pass in the Night	179
XXI.	Crooknose Represents	187

DICK

XXII.	Privates of Industry	191
XXIII.	How Dick Came to San Clemente	198
XXIV.	Land of Afternoon	206
XXV.	Early History of a Dollar	211
XXVI.	Tinted News	220
XXVII.	Men of Harlech	227

THE BELLS OF ST. CLEMENS

XXVIII.	Little Black Toodles	233
XXIX.	Forgive	238
XXX.	Face Up	244
XXXI.	Sale or Barter	249
XXXII.	Letter of the Contract	253
XXXIII.	You Never Can Tell	260
XXXIV.	Meddling of Mr. Breen	264
XXXV.	Robin's Not Here	267
XXXVI.	Money Talks	272

OVER THE MALIBU

XXXVII.	The Enchanted Valley	274
XXXVIII.	Wizard of Finance	281
XXXIX.	"If Anthony Be Well Remembered Yet"	287
XL.	The Arbitrator	294
XLI.	The Witch Hills	300

PROLOGUE

THE HAND OF THE POTTER

After a momentary Silence spake
A Vessel of a more ungainly make:
"They sneer at me for learning all awry—
What! Did the Hand then of the Potter shake?"

WEST IS WEST

I

THE KEEPER OF THE GATE

Fall came early to the hills; a fall alien and strange to the desert. Fifty years gone, the year of Valverde and Glorieta, even such a misty and sunless September came last to the San Quentin country—yes, and strange flowers sprang up overnight, bright-glowing, nameless and unknown to any man. Señor, I have ridden across this bare desert when the air was drowsy with sweetness; stirrup deep all day in wondrous blossoms, snow-white, blue and purple, golden, fire-red, nameless.—So quavered Don Apolonio, keeper of the well at the gate of the desert.

What does the Señor think? Will that wild beauty come again to San Quentin? Have those seeds slept in the blistered earth for fifty years, safe, unimpatient, waiting for this year of many rains? Perhaps.

Assuredly, the Señor may buy the sorrel at the price he names, and I will do according to his word for this dark one that he leaves behind.—Red gold, broad pieces—right! Now is Alizan thine. A good horse: but the price is a great price. Deal justly with him, Señor. Ask him not for great speed, for that gift he lacks. A great heart, toughness, courage—these are Alizan's, and he will do you good service.

Will not the Señor rest until the morrow before he crosses the plains of San Quentin? He will be welcome. No? The Señor is in haste, perhaps. Food, then? A bit in hand the while: tortillas and jerky in your saddle-bag, for the night camp. There will be water in pools by the wayside.

Nay, you are welcome, Señor. Nay, I have no more fresh horses in the pasture. Nay, none will call me to question in the matter of Alizan. I do what I will with mine own. I am

the Keeper of the Gate. Fifty and four years have I kept the gate, selling water and food at a price, giving freely of water and food to those who lacked silver. Whither they go, whence they come and why—it is not my affair. Bethink you, Señor, had I sought to stay such as pass on to the waste places—something swiftly—I had not kept the gate fifty years, nor four. Another had sat in my stead, long since. Farewell then, Señor—go with God!

Now, thou very tired horse and disconsolate, I am to rub thee with care, and give thee water sparingly, abundant feed and soft litter—yes and to cheer thee with kind words. An ill-favored Señor, that: yet he charged me to speak comfortable words to you. Ho! How art thou caked with mire, Droophead! Without doubt that Señor was in haste.

II

BEYOND THE DESERT

MacGregor was in haste. He pressed forward in a close, fine rain. A huge and graceless hulk of a man, he rode craftily, a brisk jog, a brisk walk; where the trail was steep, he slipped from the saddle and led the way to the next smooth bit.

Hard by the head of the pass, where the peaks of San Quentin—monstrous, exaggerated, fantastic—frowned through fog and mist, he paused on a jutting shoulder in a brief lull between showers. The night drew near. The fog lifted for a space as a gust of wind whipped between the hills: far behind and below there was a glimpse of toiling horsemen, a black wavering line where the trail clung to the hillside.

MacGregor lifted the heavy brows that pent his piggy little red eyes. His face was a large red face, heavy, square, coarse-featured, stubbly. It now expressed no emotion. Unhurriedly, he took up a long thirty-forty from the sling below the stirrup leather, raised the sights high, and dropped two bullets in the trail before the advancing party. They shrank back to a huddling clump. The mist shut down.

Under shelter of his long slicker, he wiped the rifle carefully and returned it to the scabbard. "Persons of no experience," he grumbled. "They ride with small caution for a country of boulders and such-like cover. If the half o' them had stayed behind at yonder well and the best few followed, each with a led horse, they might well ha' caught me oop ere I could win across yonder weary plain. No judgment at all!"

The critic clicked his teeth disparagingly as he remounted.

" 'Tis plain I have naught to fear from these gentry for all the heavy weight this red horse of mine must carry. For they will think twice and again at each bend and rockfall.

Aweel—I hae seen worse days. Thanks to this good rain, I needna fear the desert either for mysel' or the beastie. Hunger and great weariness, pain and jostling death, these I can make shift to bear—but against naked thirst no man can strive for long—But beyont the desert? Ay, there's the kittle bit. There's a telephone line awa' to the north, and if the good folk of Datil be at all of enterprising mind, 'tis like I shall hear tidings."

Dawn found him beyond the desert, breasting the long slow ridges beneath the wooded mountain of the Datils. The storm was passed away. Behind, the far peaks of San Quentin fluttered on the horizon, dream-pale; and then, in one swift moment, flamed at a touch of sudden sun, radiant and rejoicing, sharp against a clean-washed sky. The desert brimmed with a golden flood of light, a flood which rolled eastward across the level, to check and break and foam against the dense, cool shadow of the Datil Range. So dense and so black was that shadow that the rambling building of the C L A ranch scarce bulked blacker: hardly to be seen, save for a thin wisp of wood smoke that feathered in the windless air.

"Ay," said the horseman. "Now the pot boils. And indeed I am wondering if my name is in that pot. For here comes one at a hard gallop—wrangling horses, belike. And now he sees me and swerves this way. Truly, I am very desirous that this man may be Mundy himself. I would ever like best to deal with principals—and Mundy is reputed a man of parts. Be it Clay Mundy or another, yon bit wire has gien him word and warning to mark who comes this way. I must e'en call science to my own employ. Hullo, Central! . . . Hullo! Give me Spunk, please. . . . Hullo, Spunk. MacGregor, speaking. Spunk, I am now come to a verra strait place, and I would be extremely blithe to hae your company. For to deal plainly wi' you, my neck is set on the venture, no less . . . I am obligit to you. Ye hae aye been dependable. See if you canna bring Common-sense wi' you. Hullo, Central! Gimme Brains. . . . What's that? No answer? Try again, Central, gin ye please. The affair is verra urgent."

The oncoming rider slowed down: MacGregor turned to meet him, his two hands resting on the saddle horn.

"'Tis Mundy's self, thanks be," he muttered. "Now, do you twa walk cannily, Spunk and Common-sense. Here is the narrow bit. Aha, Brains! Are ye there at the last of it? That's weel! I shall need you!"

He rode on at a walk. The riders drew abreast.

"Hands up, you!" Mundy's gun was drawn and leveled with incredible swiftness.

MacGregor's hands did not move from the saddle horn: he leaned on them easily. "And that is no just what ye might call a ceevil greeting, Mister Mundy. Ye give me but a queer idea of your hospitality. Many, ye think puirly! Do ye see this rifle under my knee? Thirty-forty, smokeless—and had I meant ye ill, it was but stepping behind a bit bush to tumble you from the saddle or e'er ye clapped eyes on me."

"You have my name, I see," said Mundy. "And there is certainly some truth in your last saying. You might have taken a pot shot at me from ambush, easy enough. Guess you didn't know we were expecting you. Unless all signs fail, you are fresh from the loot of Luna. Now I've had about enough nonsense from you. Stick up those hands or I'll blow you into eternity."

"And that is a foolish obsairve," said MacGregor, composedly. "'Into eternity!' says he! Man, I wonder at ye! We're in eternity just noo—every minute of it—as much as we e'er shall be. For the ambush, you do me great wrong. I was well knowing to yon mischief-making telephone—but I took my chance of finding you a man of sense. For my hands, they are very well where they are. You have me covered—what more would you wish? I have conscientious scruples aboot this hands up business. It is undeegnified in the highest degree. Man, theenk ye I have nae self-luve at all! Hands up might be all verra weel for a slim young spark like you, wi' looks and grace to bear it off with. But me, wi' my years and the hulking carcass of me, in such a bairnly play—man, I should look just reedeeculous! The thing cannae be done."

"Very well. I am coming to get your gun. Keep your hands on the saddle horn. I have you covered, and if you crook a finger, I'll crook mine."

"'Tis early yet in the day, Mr. Mundy." MacGregor held

the same attitude and the same unmoved composure. "Dinna be hasty in closing in upon me. I was thinking to propose a compromise."

"A compromise? And me with finger on trigger—me that could hit you blindfolded?"

"Nae doot of it at all. I am well acquaint wi' you by repute. Ye have the name of a man of speerit and of one skilly wi' his gun and unco' swift to the back o' that. Myself, I am slow on the draw. 'Tis lamentable, but I must needs admit it. I am no what ye might ca' preceesly neemble of body or of mind—but, man! if I'm slow, I'm extrordinary eefeecient! If you crook that finger you are speaking of, I am thinking the two of us may miss the breakfast cooking yonder. For myself, I am free to say I had far liefer crook elbows wi' you over a thick beefsteak."

"Fool! I can shoot you three times before you get to your gun."

"Nae doot, nae doot," said MacGregor pacifically. "It has been done—yet here am I, little the waur o't. Come, Mr. Mundy, I must deal plainly wi' you. Long ago, that place where your ranch is was pointit oot to me by yon square-capped peak behind for landmark—and I came here the noo rather than to any ither spot round aboot this wide circle of the plains of San Quentin, preceesly because ye are bespoken a man of parts and experience—and thereby the better able to judge weel and deal wisely with another man as good as yoursel'."

"Sure of that?"

"Positeeve. Now, understand me weel. I am laying no traps to tempt your eye to rove—so dinna look, but e'en take my word for it. But gin ye were free to look ye wad see, as I did just ere you came, some ten-twelve black specks coming this way ahindt me on the plain, a long hour back, or near two—and ye may draw your ain conclusions thereby. To speak the plain truth, I doot they mean me nae guid at a'."

"I should conclude that this was your unlucky day. Mr. Whatever-your-name-is. Quite aside from these gentlemen behind, or from myself—and you may possibly be underrating me—the whole country east of here is warned by telepbone. Heavy, heavy hangs over your head!"

"I am a little struck wi' that circumstance myself," said MacGregor simply. "Ye see the seetuation wi' great clearness, Mr. Mundy. But I have seen worse days and have good hopes to come fairly off from this one yet. For if you can eenstruct me in what way I should be any worse off to be shot by you just now, than to be hanged in a tow from a pleasant juniper a little later, after tedious delays and parley-wows, I shall be the more obleegit. For then I can plainly see my way to give myself up to you. If you canna do this, then I shall expect ye, as a reasoning man yourself, to note that ye can have naught to gain by changing shots wi' one who has naught to lose, and to conseeder the proposeetion I mak to you—as I should surely do and the cases were changed."

"You put it very attractively and I see your point," said Mundy. A slow smile lit up his face. He put his gun back in the scabbard. "Well, let's have it."

"And a verra guid choice, too. If it be not askin' too much, let us e'en be riding toward your ranch gate while ye hear my offer, for when the sun reaches here we should be seen—and yonder weary bodies gain on us while we stand here daffing."

They made a strange contrast: Mundy, smooth, slender and graceful, black of hair and eye, poised, lithe and tense, a man to turn and look after: MacGregor, stiff, unwieldy, awkward, gross, unkempt, battered, year-bitten.

"For the first of it, ye should know that not one of these gentry behind have seen my face, the which I kep' streectly covered durin' my brief stay in Luna. Second, though no great matter, ye may care to know that the bit stroke I pulled off in Luna was even less than justice. For within year and day a good friend of mine was there begowked and cozened by that same partnership—yes and that wi' treachery and broken trust to the back of it—of mair than I regained for him by plain and open force at noonday. So much for that—though I do not hold you squeamish. Third, for your own self, it is far known that you and the Wyandotte Company and Steel-foot Morgan are not agreeing verra well——"

"You never heard that I've taken any the worst of it, did you?"

"No, but that they keep you weel occupied. Also, that hired warriors from the Tonto are to join wi' Webb of the Wyandotte. So hear me now. I need nae ask of ye if ye have ony but discreet persons aboot ye?"

Mundy laughed. "Boys are floating in the Malibu hills with a pack outfit. No one at the ranch today but Hurley, the water-mason. He's all right."

"Verra weel. Do you send him away betimes on that beastie atween your knees, and I will be water-mason to you —the mair that I can run your steam-pump as well as the best, though there will be small need of pumps till these rains be over. The story will be that the outlaw-body passed by night, unseen, liftin' your night-horse as he flitted, and leavin' this sorrel of mine. Your man Hurley can join your outfit and lose himself. That will be my gain, for I shall be blameless Maxwell, your water-mason—and who so eager to run down the runagate robber as he? And when they see how it is, that their man has got clean away, these men from Luna will know that the jig is definitely up and they will be all for the eating and sleeping."

"Very pretty, and it can be done—since they do not know you," agreed Mundy. "They will not be expecting their outlaw to call them in to breakfast, certainly. But I do not see where I am to gain anything."

"You are to hear, then," said the outlaw. "I will praise the bridge that carries me over, but I will do more too: I will mend that bridge. I will fight your battles with you against all comers. Not murder, you mind, but plain warfare against men fit for war."

"A fighting man, and slow on the draw?"

"I am that same, both the one and the other. Slow, I can not deny it—slow, in compare with the best. But man, I'm experienced, I'm judgmatical, and I'm fine on the latter end. I'm a good person to have at your right hand or your left. Some way, I dinna prosper verra weel as chief man—but as the next best, there is none better rides leather."

"You come well recommended."

"By myself, you are meaning? And just that you may know the worth of that recommend, I am telling ye that my name is no exactly Maxwell. You have had word of me,

your ownself, in El Paso, where indeed I saw your face, though you saw not mine. And I would have ye to observe, Mr. Mundy, that I keepit my name streectly to myself for such time as ye might have taken the sound of it as a threat, and give it to you now only when it comes mair as a promise. So now I offer you the naked choice, peace or war—and the last word is with you. A hundred miles and twenty, at the least of it, I have now made in sax-and-thirty hours—and blow high, blow low, I ride no step beyond yonder gate."

"I am decidedly inclined toward peace," said Clay Mundy, smiling again, "if only to hear you talk. For you talk convincingly. My own risk in the matter—which you have been kind enough not to mention—also moves me that way. And, after all, your late exploit at Luna is nothing to me. But as to your value in my little range war—you forgot to mention the name, you know."

"The name is MacGregor."

"Not Sandy MacGregor? Of Black Mountain?"

"That same. Plain shooting done neatly."

"You're on," said Clay Mundy.

So MacGregor became Maxwell, and Mundy's. The search party came, and swore, and slept; for they were weary. None mistrusted Maxwell, that kindly and capable cook, who sympathized so feelingly with them concerning the upness of the jig. In the seven-up tournament organized after that big sleep, Maxwell won the admiration of all and the money of most: and they went home mingling praises of their new friend with execrations of the escaped outlaw.

III

PICTURED ROCK

"And the herdsman of Gerar did strive with Isaac's herdsmen, saying, The water is ours."

That was at the well Esek. The patriarchs were always quarreling with their neighbors or with each other over wells, pasturage and other things—mavericks, maybe. Abraham, Laban, Lot, Isaac, Jacob—they led a stirring life, following the best grass. You ought to read about them, sometime.

It is entirely probable that Terah went forth from Ur of the Chaldees either because the grass was short or because he had no friends on the grand jury.

Cattlemen have not changed much since then. They still swing a big loop: it is as risky as ever to let the stock out on shares: and we still have cattle wars wherever there is free range, because of the spirit so justly expressed by Farmer Jones: "He said he wasn't no land-hog—all he wants is just what joins his'n."

Human nature is the same on the plains of Mamre or of San Quentin: so there is no new thing to tell about the Mundy-Morgan war. Wrong and folly and stubborness; small matter now whose first the blame; this might have been a page of history.

Strcng warriors, able leaders, Ben "Steel-foot" Morgan, Webb of the Wyandotte outfit, and Clay Mundy: sharp and bitter hate was in their hearts, and the feud was more savage than the usual run of cattle wars: carried on (of course) upon a higher plane than any "civilized" warfare. For there were restrictions, there were limits. To rise up from a man's table and war upon that man while the taste of his bread was still sweet in your mouth—such dealing would have been unspeakable infamy in the San Quentin country.

Again, you might be unfriends with a man and yet meet on neutral ground or when each was on his lawful occasions,

without trouble. It was not the custom to war without fresh offense, openly given. You must not smile and shoot. You must not shoot an unarmed man, and you must not shoot an unwarned man. Here is a nice distinction, but a clear one: you might not ambush your enemy; but when you fled and your enemy followed, you might then waylay and surprise without question to your honor, for they were presumed to be on their guard and sufficiently warned. The rattlesnake's code, to warn before he strikes, no better: a queer, lop-sided, topsy-turvey, jumbled and senseless code—but a code for all that. And it is worthy of note that no better standard has ever been kept with such faith as this barbarous code of the fighting man.

Roundup season passed with no fresh outbreak of hostilities. After the steer-shipping, Mr. Maxwell had been given a mount, a rope and a branding iron, and so turned loose to learn the range. This was equivalent to letters of Marque and Reprisal.

Mr. Maxwell was camped at Whitewater, alone. So far, he had passed a pleasant day. He had killed a fat buck at daybreak, when he wrangled horses. Later, he had ridden leisurely in nooks and corners, branding two of his employer's calves, overlooked by the roundup, two of the Y calves, and one long eared yearling—a pleasing total of five for the C L A tally-book. So far his services had been confined to such peaceful activities as these: the war had languished since the rains set in. It was late October now, and the rains were still falling. The desert was glorified with the magic of that belated spring; the flowers of old Apolonio's youth stood stirrup-high once more, even as he had hoped and said.

All day it had been cloudy. While Mr. Maxwell was branding his maverick it began to sprinkle; when he turned it loose the sprinkle had become rain, the clouds were banked dark and sullen against the mountains. He wriggled into his slicker and started for camp, but the rain turned to a blinding storm and he was glad to turn his back to its fury and ride his straightest for the next shelter.

Pictured Rock is an overhanging cliff of limestone, sheltered from three winds. Gray walls and creamy roof are close

covered with the weird picture writing of Apache and Navajo, a record of the wars and journeys of generations.

As he turned the bend in the canon, Maxwell saw a great light glowing under Pictured Rock, now veiled by the driving sheets of rain, now beating out in gusts across the murky dark, reflected and magnified by the cliff behind. Another, storm driven like himself, was before him. He paused at the hill-foot and shouted:

"Hullo, the house! Will your dog bite?"

"Hi!" It was a startled voice: a slender figure in a yellow slicker appeared beside the fire. "Dog's dead, poor fellow—starved to death! Come on up!"

The C L A man rode up the short zig-zag of the trail to the fire-lit level. He took but one glance and swept off his hat, for the face he saw beneath the turned up sombrero was the bright and sparkling face of a girl.

"You will be Miss Bennie May Morgan? I saw you in Magdalena at the steer-shipping."

"Quite right. And you are Mr. Sandy Maxwell, the new warrior for Clay Mundy."

"Faces like ours are not easily forgot," said Maxwell.

Miss Bennie laughed. Her eyes crinkled when she laughed. "I will give you a safe-conduct. Get down—unless you are afraid of hurting your reputation, that is." She sat upon her saddle blankets where they were spread before the fire, and leaned back against the saddle.

The C L A man climbed heavily down and strode to the fire, where he stood dripping and silent. The grinding of boulders in the flooded cañon rose loud and louder, swelled to a steady ominous roar by the multitudinous echoes of the hills.

"Well! How about that lunch?" demanded Miss Bennie sharply. "It's past noon."

"Sorry, Miss Morgan, but I have not so much as a crumb. And that is a bad thing, for you are far from home, and who knows when this weary storm will be by? But doubtless they will be abroad to seek for you."

Miss Bennie laid aside the hat and shook her curly head decidedly. "Not for me. Dad thinks I'm visiting Effie at the X L and Effie thinks I'm home by this time. But this storm won't last. The sun will be out by three. You'll see!

And now, if you please, since you can't feed me, hadn't you better entertain me? Sit down, do!"

"It is like that I should prove entertaining for a young maid, too!" said Maxwell, carrying a flat stone to the fire to serve for a seat.

"Oh, you never can tell! Suppose, for a starter, you tell me what you are thinking so busily."

"I am thinking," said Maxwell, slowly, "that you are a bonnie lass and a merry one. And I was thinking one more thing, too. The X L is awa' to the southeast and the Morgan home ranch as far to the southwest. Now what may Miss Bennie Morgan need of so much northing, ten long miles aside from the straight way, and her friend Effie thinking she was safe home and all? And then I thought to myself, the folk at San Quentin are very quiet now. It is to be thought that the season of great plenty has put them in better spunk with the world. And it is an ill thing that a way cannot be found to make an end of this brawling for good and all. And, thinks I, the bonny Earl of Murray himself was not more goodly to the eye than Clay Mundy—and it is a great peety for all concerned that Clay Mundy is not storm-bound this day at Picture Rock, rather than I!"

"Well!" Miss Bennie gasped and laughed frankly, blushed red, neck and cheek. "Oh, you men! And while you were making this up——"

"It is what I thought," said Maxwell stoutly. "Only I was nae thinking words, d'ye see? I was just thinking thoughts. And it is no verra easy to put thoughts into words."

"Well, then—while you were thinking all those preposterous thoughts, I was seeing a wonderful picture, very much like this storm, and this cave, and this fire, and us. If I were a painter, this is what I would try to paint: a hill-side like this—so you might feel what you could not see, the black night and the wild storm. The black night, and a red fire glowing in a cave-mouth, and a wind-bent tree close beside: and by the fire a man straining into the night at some unseen danger; a cave-man, clad in skins, with long matted hair, broad-shouldered, long-armed, ferocious, brutal—but unafraid. He is half-crouching, his knees bent to spring: he is peering under his hand: the other hand clutches a knotted club: a dog

strains beside his foot, snarling against the night, teeth bared, glaring, stiff legs braced back, neck bristling: behind them, half-hidden, shrinking in the shadow—a woman and a child. And the name of that picture would be 'Home!' "

Maxwell's heavy face lit up, his dull and little eye gleamed with an answering spark, his sluggish blood thrilled at the spirit and beauty of her: his voice rang with a heat of frank admiration. "And that is a brave thought you have conjured up, too, and I will be warrant you would be unco' fine woman to a cave-man— though I'm judgin' you would be having a bit club of your own." He paused, fixed her with a meditative eye, and spoke again in a lighter tone. "I recognize myself, and the dog is dead, puir fellow—starved to death, you said. But I would have you observe that the thoughts of the two of us differed but verra little when all is said—forbye it ran in my mind that a much younger person was to be cave-man to you. And you gave me safe-conduct, too! Are you to be man-sworn, then, and me trusting to you?"

"Now you are trying to torment me," said Miss Bennie, briskly. "I can't have that, you know. Better give it up. Roll a smoke. I know you want to. The storm is slacking already—we will be going soon."

"A pipe, since you are so kind," said Maxwell, fumbling for it.

"Do you admire your friend Clay Mundy so much?" said Miss Bennie next, elbows on knees, chin in hands.

Maxwell rolled a slow eye on her, and blew out a cloud of smoke. "My employer. I did not say friend, though if I like him no worse it may come to that yet. He has the devil's own beauty—which thing calls the louder to me, misshapen as you see me. He is a gallant horseman, fame cries him brave and proven. But I am not calling him friend yet till I know the heart of him. Fifty-and-five I am, and I can count on the fingers of my twa hands the names of those I have been willing to call wholly friend—forbye one of those few was my enemy to my overthrow. So you will not be taking Clay Mundy to your cave upon my say-so till I am better acquaint wi' him. But dootless you know him verra well yourself."

Miss Bennie evaded this issue. She became suddenly gloomy. "It is plain that you are a stranger here, since you

talk so glibly of any lasting peace in the San Quentin. A wicked, stiff-necked unreasoning pack, they are—dad and all! There has never been anything but wrong and hate here, outrage and revenge, and there never will be. It is enough to make one believe in the truth of original sin and total depravity!"

"No truth at all!" cried Maxwell warmly. "Oreeginal sin is just merely a fact—no truth at a'! Folks are aye graspin' as some puir halflin fact and settin' it up to be the truth. It takes at least three trees to make a row, and it needs at least three facts to make a truth. Mankind is blind, foolish and desperately wicked—yes, take it from me that am an old ruffian. But mankind is also eencurably good—wise and strong and splendid and kindly and brave—in your time of sorrow and danger you will find it so—and there's another glaring fact for you! With endless rain earth would drown, wi' endless sun it would be a cinder: look about you now, see what sun and rain and evil and good have wrought together, grass and flower and bud and fruit, the bonny warld and the bonny race o' men! World and man, the machine Works! And there's the third fact for you, lassie, and the weightiest fact. We are a Going Concern: we pay a profit to our Owner! And for the truth behind these three facts, may not this be it: That if we are at once evil and good, it is the good God who made us that way, not in sloth, but because He wanted us to be that way? It is so I think. But it is a strange thing to me that I am most roundly abused for disrespect to the Maker whene'er I dare venture the mild guess that perhaps He knew what He was about!"

"A very fine sermon, reverend sir, though I did not get the text," said Miss Bennie, twinkling. "And now if you will give me your benediction, I will be on my way soon. The storm is breaking. It will clear as suddenly as it came on."

Maxwell shook out the saddle blankets and saddled her horse. "For the text, it is this: "And God saw everything that He had made and behold it was very good.—And I am an old fool as well as old ruffian," he grumbled, "for I have wearied you."

"Oh, no, you haven't. Your theology took my breath away, rather—that's all. It was so very unexpected."

"Of course, I will be seeing that you get safe home——"

"You mustn't. It would only make you a hard ride for nothing. No need of it at all. There is time for me to get home while the sun is still an hour high."

"It doesn't seem right," protested Maxwell.

"Really, I'd rather you wouldn't," said Miss Bennie earnestly. "I don't want to be rude, but I am still—" She gave him her eyes and blushed to her hair—"I am still . . . north of where I should be, as you so shrewdly observed. And your camp lies farther yet to the north."

"Good-by, then, Miss Morgan."

"Good-by, Mr. MacGregor."

He stared after her as she rode clattering down the steep. "MacGregor!" he repeated. "MacGregor, says she! And never a soul of the San Quentin kens aught of the late MacGregor save Clay Mundy's own self! Here is news! Is she so unco' chief wi' him as that, then? And who told her whaur my camp was; she was glib to say that she had time enow to go home or sundown—but she was careful she didnae say she was gaun there! Little lady, it is in my mind that you are owre far north!"

She waved her hand gaily; her fresh young voice floated back to him, lingering, soft and slow:

He was a braw gallant,
And he rid at the ring;
And the bonny Earl of Murray
Oh! He might have been a king.

He was a braw gallant,
And he played at the glove;
And the bonny Earl of Murray
Oh! He was the Queen's love!

Oh! Lang may his lady
Luke owre the castle down,
Ere she see the Earl of Murray
Come sounding thro' the town.

The girl passed from sight down the narrow cañon. MacGregor-Maxwell gave his head a shaking then, to clear his thoughts, and put foot to stirrup. When he came to the beaten trail again, where the horse's feet pattered rhythmically

on the firm ground, MacGregor half-sang, half-crooned, a plaintiff and wandering air:

Then I pray you do not trust the hawk again,
The cruel hawk that mocks thy love, like me.
Oh, alone, betrayed and sad although I leave thee,
Yet the wandering traitor weeps, poor love, for thee—
Ay! Paloma azul!

"The de'il and his horns! Now why do I sing such an ill-omened and unchancy song as that?" He shook his great shoulders, as if to shake off a weight: he held his cupped hand to his mouth. "Hullo, Central! Can you get Brains for me? . . . Try again, please. . . . Now, Brains, you are partly acquaint wi' this day's doings. But did you mark the bonny blush of her at the name of Clay Mundy—and her so far from the plain way, wi' no cause given? . . . Ye didna? . . . Brains, you're but a cauld, feckless, dusty-dry thing, when all's said. Well then, I am telling you of it. And what am I to do in such case as that? . . . A little louder, please! . . . Oh! I am to see where Clay Mundy rides this day, if it is any affair of mine—is that it? . . . Surely it is my business. Any man is natural protector to any woman against any man except himself. . . . And if he means her naething but good? . . . It is what I will know. And then I will be best man—and to be best man at this employ should be no empty form. For indeed I think the Morgans are like to be little pleased.

"Aweel, Brains, I will e'en do your bidding, and I will seek proof where Clay Mundy fares this day—though I tell you plainly that I know very well now. And I scorn for a slow, speeritless, doddering sluggard—you and your proofs! You can but look through a hole in a stone wall, at the most of it. What are walls for but to leap over—can you tell me that? Show me once a braw lass and a high hard wall and a lad beyond, and I will show you a place where there shall be a fine climbing done—the more when the young folk are so bold and bonny as the twa of them yonder towards the sunset. . . . What's that? How do I know? . . . Brains, I wonder at ye, I fairly peety you—and that's the truth of it. Where else should he be?"

IV

GOOD-BY

"I THOUGHT it was you," said Miss Bennie May Morgan. "So I waited for you. Aren't you rather out of your own range, Mr. Maxwell? The Morgans'll get you if you don't watch out!"

With elaborate surprise, MacGregor took his bearings from the distant circling hills. "Why so I am! I was on my way to Datil," he explained. "I see now"—he jerked a thumb back over his shoulder—"that I should have ridden east-like this morning instead of west."

"It is shorter that way—and dryer," she agreed. "This road to Datil is very damp after you pass California."

"Shall I ride with you a bit on your way?" said MacGregor. "I can still get back to my camp before sundown. Mind you, I am not saying at all that I shall go to my camp by that hour, but only that there is time enough."

Then Miss Bennie Morgan knew where she stood. She flicked at her stirrup with a meditative quirt. "Why, I said something about I like that to you last week at Pictured Rock, didn't I?"

"Very much like that."

"When you got lost today," said Miss Bennie thoughtfully, "I suppose you were composing a sermon?"

"Why, no, I wasnae. It was like this. Clay Mundy set off for Datil early this morning, you see, whilst I staid in camp, shoeing horses. He was riding his Jugador horse—fine I ken the crooked foot of him. And when later in the day I came upon the track of that twisted hoof, I found suddenly a great desire to go after him to Datil, where I have never yet been. And I said to myself, 'Plainly if you follow this track you will come to that place.' And so you see me here."

"And now that you're here, Mr. ——?"

"Maxwell—not MacGregor," said MacGregor.

"Thank you; Maxwell. Not MacGregor. I must remember

that." She turned clear, unflinching eyes upon him. "Well, let's have it!"

"Er—why—eh!" said MacGregor, and swallowed hard. "I don't quite understand you."

"Oh, yes you do!" said Miss Bennie cheerfully. "Don't squirm. What's on your mind?"

"It is now on my mind that it would be none such a bad scheme for me to turn tail bravely and run away from this place," said MacGregor, truthfully; quite taken aback at this brisk and matter-of-fact directness.

In her innermost heart Miss Bennie knew certainly—without reason, as women know these things—that this grim old man-at-arms liked her very well, and came as a friend.

"Blackmail? Oh no—that is not in your line. And I do not take you for a tell-tale, either." She looked him over slowly and attentively; a cruel, contemplative glance. It brought a dull glow to MacGregor's leathern face, even before she spoke. "I see!" She dropped the reins and clapped her hands together. "You were planning to take Clay Mundy's place with me—is that it?"

MacGregor plucked up spirit at the taunt. "And that was an unkind speech of you, Miss Morgan."

Her eyes danced at him. "There is but one thing left, then. You have come to plead with me for your friend—your employer—to ask me to spare his youth and innocence—to demand of me, as the phrase goes, if my intentions are honorable. Is that it?"

"It is something verra like that, then, if I must brave your displeasure so far as to say it. And it is my poor opinion that so much was verra needful—though it was in my mind to give you but the bare hint that your secret was stumbled upon. For what one has chanced upon this day another may chance tomorrow. And there was something else besides, which I find ill to put to words to."

The girl dropped all pretense. "I think you meant kindly by me, Mr. MacGregor, and I thank you for it. And you must consider that our case is hard indeed. For where can we meet, if not secretly? Fifty miles each way, every ranch is lined up on one side or the other of this feud. One word to my father's ear will mean bloodshed and death—and then, whoever wins, Bennie Morgan must lose."

"Yet you must meet?" said MacGregor.

She met his eyes bravely. "Yet we must meet!" She said it proudly.

"You two should wed out of hand then, and put the round world between you and this place," said MacGregor.

Miss Bennie sighed. "That is what I tell Clay. It is the only way. Soon or late, if we live here, those two would clash, my father and my husband. If we go away, father may get over it in time. Clay does not want to go. He can not bear to have it said that he had to run away from San Quentin. But I will never marry him till he is ready to go."

"He is a fool for his pains, and I will be the one who will tell him that same!" declared MacGregor, stoutly. "Him and his pride! He should be proud to run further and faster than ever man rode before on such an argument."

"No—you mustn't say one word to him about me—please! He would be furious—and he is a dangerous man!"

"I thank ye kindly for this unexpected care of my safety," said MacGregor humbly.

"Oh these men! Must you hear that you are so dangerous, too? There would be trouble, and you know it. Clay's as cross as a bear with a sore head, now—so I think he is coming to my way of thinking, and doesn't like to own up. Don't you say anything to him. I'll tell him—not that you have seen me, but that we might so easily be seen—and that our meetings must be few and far between. That will help to make up his mind, too, if he feels——" She checked herself, with a startled shyness in her sudden drooping lids: she was only a young girl, for all her frank and boyish courage. "I will warn him, then. And yet I think there is no man who would not think twice before he whispered evil of Ben Morgan's daughter and"—she held her head proud, she lifted her brave eyes—"and Clay Mundy's sweetheart!"

MacGregor checked his horse, his poor, dull face for once lit up and uplifted: whatever had been best of him in all his wasted and misspent life stirred at the call of her gallant girlhood.

"I think there will be no man so vile as to think an evil thing of you," he said. "Miss Morgan, I was a puir meddlin'

fool to come here on such an errand—and yet I am glad that I came, too. And now I shall go back and trouble you nae mair. Yet there is one thing, too, before I turn back—and I think you will not laugh."

She faced him where he stood: so that he carried with him a memory of her dazzling youth against a dazzle of sun. "I shall not laugh."

"It is better than fifty years, they tell me, since last the San Quentin knew any such rains as these," said MacGregor slowly. "This place has the ill name of a desert. Yet all this day the air has been heavy with sweetness; all day long I have ridden stirrup-deep in strange bright flowers—and no man knows the name of them! Fifty years they have slept in the blistered brown earth, the seeds of these nameless flowers, waiting for this year of many rains. Lassie, there are only too many men, like me, of deserved and earned ill name, as of waste places where no good thing can flourish. And when you think of us, I would have you remember how this bright, belated spring-tide came to San Quentin. I would have you think there may be hidden seeds of good in us yet—if only the rains might come! And if ever you have any need of me—as is most unlike—I shall be leal friend to you, I shall stick at nothing in your service. It is so that I would have you think of old MacGregor. Good-by!"

"I shall not forget," said Bennie. "But you said there was something else—something hard to put into words?"

MacGregor took off his hat. "I think there will be no need to say that—to you," he said.

Once more her eyes searched him and this time he did not flinch—so high he held her now in his thought. She read his answering look. "Yes—since this is the day for plain-speaking, let me say it for you. You mean . . . that it is not only whispering tongues I have to fear, or my father's anger—no, nor black death itself—but that I must fear myself most of all? But, Mr. MacGregor—there was need to say that indeed! And now you are my friend, for I have trusted you very greatly."

"Good-by, then!" said MacGregor again. He bent over her hand.

"Good-by!"

V

SKULLSPRING

MacGregor worked out the Whitewater country and moved his camp to Bear Springs, on the southern frontier of the Mundy range. From here he rode the cedar brakes on the high flanks of the mountain, branding late calves. This work was most effectively done at early daybreak and at sundown, when the wild cattle ventured from the thickets into the open glades and valleys.

For a week, Milt Craig had ridden with him. But Milt had made his pack yesterday and moved on to the Cienaga, where MacGregor was to join him later, once he had picked up the few calves that still went unbranded in the Bear Spring country. So today MacGregor rode alone.

Ever drifting from one bunch of cattle to another and then on to another clump of red and white on the next hill-side, as the day wore on he found himself well across in the Wyandotte-Morgan country; prowling in the tangle of hills, south of the Magdalena road, which was the accepted dividing line.

As the sun rode on to afternoon, the prowler turned back, and made his way to Skullspring, with a thought of the trickle of water that dripped from the high cliffs there; and as he came down a ridge of backbone from the upper bench, he saw a little curl of smoke rising above the Skullspring bluff.

MacGregor remarked upon this fact to Neighbor his horse. "We are in a hostile country, Neighbor," said he. "For all we are so quiet and peaceful these days, it will be the part of prudence to have a look into this matter, least we go blundering in where we arenae much wanted." He tied Neighbor in a little hollow of the hill, and went down with infinite precaution to the edge of the cliff above Skullspring.

Three men were by the the fire below—all strangers to MacGregor. That gentleman lay flat on the rock, peering through a bush, and looked them over. Clearly, they had only stopped to Skullspring for nooning. Two were cowboys: their saddled horses stood by. The younger of these two stowed a little grub-sack under the seat of a light buggy that stood by the fire. The third person, a tall man of about thirty, had the look of a town-man. He wore a black suit and a "hard-boiled" hat.

"I tell you," said the older cowboy, a sullen-faced young man. "I'll be good and glad a-plenty when this thing is over with. It's a shaky business."

"Don't get cold feet, Joe," advised the tall man. "You're getting big money, mighty big money, for a small risk."

"I notice there's none of these San Quentin *hombres* caring for any of it," grumbled Joe, sulkily.

"Aw, now, be reasonable," said the tall man. "He wouldn't risk letting any of the home people know. Too shaky. You get the chance just because you're a stranger. And because you're a stranger, you can get away without being noticed."

Plainly, here was mischief afoot. It seemed likely to MacGregor that Clay Mundy was to be object of it.

The younger man of the party spoke up. "I'm not only goin' to get away, but I'm goin' to keep on gettin' away. I'm after that dough all right, all right—but lemme tell you, Mr. Hamerick, this country'll be too hot for me when it's over."

MacGregor barely breathed. It appeared that the tall man was Hamerick, for he answered. "I'm going away myself. But this is too good a chance for easy money, and we don't want to make a hash of it. Keep your nerve. Your part is easy. You take the first right-hand trail and drift south across that saddle-back pass yonder, so you'll get there before I do. You'll find the Bent ranch right under the pass. Nobody there. The Bents have all gone to Magdalena for supplies. Mrs. Bent is going to Socorro and Bent'll wait for her. You're to make yourselves at home, so there won't be anything suspicious—new men working there; sorry the Bents are gone, and all that." He kicked out the dying fire.

"And if anyone comes, then what?" Joe glowered at him with the question.

"Then your're strangers, passing by. It isn't at all likely that any one'll come. The nearest ranch is twenty-five miles. But if any one should come, it's all off, for today. We want to have the longest start we can get. And for Mundy, he has his own reasons. You'll ride out to good grass and make camp. If we see your fire, Mundy and me'll turn back. We'll pull it off tomorrow."

Mundy! MacGregor's heart leaped. Were the men to entice Mundy to the Bent ranch and murder him there, while he was off his guard, thinking himself among friends? MacGregor drew his gun, minded to fall upon the plotters without more ado: the vantage of ground more than made up for the odds of numbers. But he put back his gun. They were to separate. He would follow the man Hamerick and deal with him alone.

"I am to meet Mundy at that little sugar-loaf hill yonder, four or five miles out on the plain," said Hamerick. "I'll be late, too—jawing with you fellows this way. Then I'll go on down the wagon-road to Bent's with him. The play is that I'm supposed to think the Bent folks are at home. You boys'll have plenty of time to get settled down."

"If we don't run into a wasp's nest," said Joe sulkily.

Hamerick scowled. "I'm the one that's taking the biggest risk, with this dammed buggy—but I've got to have it, to play the part. I'll leave it, once I get safe back to my saddle."

"We three want to ride in three different directions," said Joe. "I wish it was over."

Hamerick gave him a sinister look. "You get no money till I get a-straddle of a horse again—I'll tell you that right now, my laddie-buck! This buggy's too easy to track up, if anything goes wrong. You'd like it first-rate to ride off scot-free and leave me to hold the sack."

"I won't, eh!" Joe took a step forward, his ugly face blotched with crimson. "Damn you, I've took just about enough from you!"

Here the younger man interposed. "Oh, you both make me sick!" His voice was cutting and cold, venomous in its unforced evenness. "I guess I'll do a little telling now, myself. If you fellows get to fighting, I'll do my best to kill both of you. Got that?"

MacGregor almost hugged himself with delight. "Oh, if they once get to shooting—if they only would!" he thought. "It would be a strange thing if between the four of us we should not do a good day's work of it!"

"Now, now, Tait——"

"Don't Tait me!" said Tait, in the same deadly level. "This is a wise bunch for a ticklish job, ain't it? I know that no one but a dirty skunk would be found in such dirty work —but is that any reason why we should be fools, too? Hamerick's right, Joe. We'll string along with him till he gets to a saddle—and then may the devil take the hindmost! Maybe we'll find a saddle at the Bent ranch. If we do, all the better. The sooner I see the last of you two, the better pleased I'll be. For you Hamerick—you're engineerin' this thing, but when it comes down to brass tacks, I'm the best man, and don't you forget it. So if you're been plannin' any nice little plans to hold out part of the price on me and Joe, you can throw 'em over for excess baggage, right here. For I'm to put it up to the paymaster, right to your face—you won't have no chance to fool us. Now don't give up any more head to me! You'll stick to me against Joe till you're horseback again, with a fair chance for a getaway: Joe'll stick to me till we get a fair divvy on the money—and if either of you don't like it, you can double up on me whenever you feel lucky. I'm ready for you both any turn in the road."

The challange went unmet. It was plain that Tait was to be master. MacGregor waited for no more. He rolled back from the bare rim with scarce more noise than a shadow would have made. He crawled to the nearest huddle of rocks and hid away. For a little, the muffled murmur of angry voices floated to him; then came the sound of wheels and a ringing of shod feet on rock; Tait and Joe toiled up the trail beyond the cliff-end, paced slowly by, black against the sky line, and dipped down into a dark hollow that twisted away towards Bent's Pass.

The tingling echoes died; and then MacGregor climbed back to Neighbor. The game was in his hands. Keeping to the ridge, he would gain a long mile on the wagon road, deep in the winding pass. He was in high feather as he followed the plunging slope; he laughed as he rode; his eyes drank

in the brightness of the day. This would be a rare jest to tell at camp-fires!

"Now I wonder who can be at the bottom of this bonny scheme?" he chuckled. "It doesnae sound much like the San Quentin folk, who, if reports be true, are accustomed to do their own murders. And if the man Hamerick tells the whole story, what then? That will be for Mundy to say. Any rate, 'tis a fine thing for Clay Mundy that my dry throttle drove me to Skullspring just at that time."

When he came into the wagon road the buggy was just before him, close to the mouth of the pass. MacGregor struck into a gallop.

The stranger had been going at a brisk gait, but at sight of the horseman he slowed to a prim and mincing little trot.

"A fine day, sir," said MacGregor civilly, as he rode alongside.

"It certainly is," said the stranger. He was plainly ill at ease at this ill-timed meeting, but tried to carry it off. "How far is it to Old Fort Tularosa, can you tell me?"

MacGregor squinted across the plain. "A matter of forty miles, I should say. Goin' across?"

The stranger shook his head. "Not to-day. I think I will camp here for the night and have a look in the hills for a deer. You're not going to the Fort yourself, are you?"

MacGregor grinned cheerfully. Knowing what he did, he knew that this was Hamerick's device to try to shake off his unwelcome company. "Well, no; not to-day. The fact is, sir"—he bent over close and sunk his voice to a confidential whisper—"the fact is, if you're for camping here the night, I must even camp here, too."

"What!"

"Just that. And first of all, do you remark this little gun which I hold here in my hand? Then I will ask you to stop and to get out upon this side, holding to your lines verra carefully lest the beastie should run away, while I search you for any bit weapons of your ain. For you spoke very glibly of hunting a deer—and yet I do not see any rifle."

Hamerick groaned as he climbed out; he had not thought of that. "I haven't any rifle. My revolver is under the cushion—but of course you can search me, if you think I've

got another. What the devil do you want, anyway? If it's money you're after, you'll get most mighty little."

"All in good time, all in good time," said MacGregor cheerfully. He went through Hamerick for arms; finding none, he went through the buggy, finding the gun under the cushion. He inspected this carefully, tried it, and stuck it in his waistband.

"Will you kindly go aside some few steps, sir?" said MacGregor politely. "I am dry, and I would have a good swig of water from your canteen, but I didnae wish to set myself in that defenseless posture of holding a canteen to my throat whilst ye were still armed."

"You see I have no money, you have my gun, you have your drink—what more do you want of me?" spluttered Hamerick. "Let me go! I have an appointment—I'll be late now."

"With that deer, ye are meaning?" MacGregor sat cross-legged on the ground and whittled off a pipeful of tobacco with loving care. He puffed a while in great satisfaction, watching his fuming captive with twinkling eyes. "Do you know, sir," he said at last, between whiffs, "that in my puir opeenion, if you knew how you are like to keep that appointment of yours, you would be little made up with it?"

Hamerick stammered. He had no idea of what his captor was driving at, but he had his own reasons for great uneasiness. He pulled himself together with an effort. "I—I don't know what you mean. I see now that you are not a robber, as I first thought. You are mistaking me for some other man. You can't be doing yourself any possible good by keeping me here. I tell you I am waited for."

"Take my word for it, sir—if you knew my way of it, you would be less impatient for that tryst of yours."

"What—what the devil do you mean?"

"I will tell you then, Mr. Hamerick." At this unexpected sound of his own name, Hamerick started visibly. "If Clay Mundy is at all of my mind, this is what we shall do: We will set you on Clay Mundy's horse and put Clay Mundy's hat upon your head; and we two will get in your bit wagon and drive you before our guns—just at dusk, d'ye mind?—to the Bent ranch; and there, if I do not miss my guess, you will be shot to death by hands of your own hiring!"

Here MacGregor, gloating on that pleasant inward vision, was extremely disconcerted by the behavior of his prospective victim. So far from being appalled, Hamerick was black with rage; he stamped, he shook his fist, he struggled for speech in a choking fury.

"You fool! You poor spy! Idiot! Bungler! Why couldn't you tell me you were Mundy's man?"

"Steady, there! Are you meaning to face it out that you did not plan to murder Clay Mundy? Because we are going on now to see him."

Hamerick gathered up the reins eagerly. "Come on, then, damn you—before it's too late!" There was relief and triumph in his voice—and at the sound of it MacGregor sickened with a guess at the whole dreadful business; the bright day faded. "Me, kill Clay Mundy? Why, you poor, pitiful bungler, Clay Mundy brought me here to play preacher for him!"

MacGregor drew back. His face flamed; his eyes were terrible. He jerked out Hamerick's gun and threw it at Hamerick's feet. There was a dreadful break in his voice. "Protect yourself!" he said.

But Hamerick shrank back, white-lipped, cringing. "I won't! I won't touch it!"

"Cur!"

"Oh, don't kill me, don't murder me!" Hamerick was wringing his hands; he was almost screaming.

MacGregor turned shamed eyes away. He took up Hamerick's gun. "Strip the harness from that horse then, take the bridle and ride! And be quick, lest I think better of it. Go back the way you came, and keep on going! For I shall tell your name and errand, and there is no man of Morgan's men but will kill you at kirk or gallows-foot."

He watched in silence as Hamerick fled. Then he rode down the pass, sick-hearted, brooding, grieving. He came to the mouth of the pass: at the plain's edge he saw a horseman, near by, coming swiftly. It was Clay Mundy.

VI

NO DWELLING MORE ON SEA OR SHORE

MacGregor slowed up. The flush of burning wrath had died away; his face was set to a heavy, impassive mask. He thrust Hamerick's gun between his left knee and the stirrup-leather and gripped it there. He rode on to meet Clay Morgan—and the nameless flowers of San Quentin were stirrup-high about him as he rode.

He drew rein so Mundy should come to his right side; and again, as at their first meeting, he laid both his hands on the saddle horn as he halted.

Clay Mundy's face was dark with suspicion.

"Have you seen a fool in a buggy?" he demanded.

"I see a fool on a horse!" responded MacGregor calmly. "For the person you seek, I have put such a word in his ear that he will never stop this side of tidewater. What devil's work is this, Clay Mundy?"

"You damned meddler! Are you coward as well as meddler, that you dare not move your hands?"

"Put up your foolish gun, man—you cannae fricht me with it. The thing is done and shooting will never undo it. There will be no mock-marriage this way, nor ony day—and now shoot, if you will, and damned to you! Man! Have ye gone clean daft? Or did ye wish to proclaim it that ye were no match for the Morgans in war? And did ye think to live the week out? That had been a chance had you married her indeed, with bell and book—as whaur could ye find better mate? But after such black treachery as ye meant—— Man, ye are not in your right mind, the devil is at your ear!"

"It is hard to kill a man who will not defend himself," said Mundy thickly. "I spared your life once because you amused me——"

"And because it was a verra judeecious thing, too—and you are well knowing to that same. Think ye I value my life owre high, or that I fear ye at all, that I come seeking you? Take shame to yourself, man! Have a better thought of it yet! Say you will marry the lassie before my eyes, and I will go with you on that errand; or turn you back and I will go with her back to the house of the Morgans—and for her sake, I will keep your shame to mysel'. Or, if it likes you better, you may even fall to the shooting."

"Fool!" said Mundy. "I can kill you before you can touch your gun."

"It is what I doubt," said MacGregor. "Please yourself. For me there is but the clean stab of death—but you must leave behind the name of a false traitor to be a hissing and a byword in the mouths of men."

"I will say this much, that I was wrong to call you coward," said Mundy, in a changed voice. "You are a bold and stubborn man, and I think there is a chance that you might get your gun—yes, and shoot straight, too. I will not marry the girl—but neither will I harm her. But I will not be driven further. I am not willing to skulk away while you tell her your way of the story. That would be too sorry a part. I will go on alone, and tell her, and send her home."

"You will say your man fled before the Morgans, or was taken by them, or some such lies, and lure her on to her ruin," said MacGregor. "I will not turn back."

"I will give you the minute to turn back," said Mundy.

"It is what I will never do!"

"Then you will die here," said Mundy.

"Think of me as one dead an hour gone," said MacGregor steadily. "My life is long since forfeit to every law of God or man. I am beyond the question. Think rather of yourself. You have the plain choice before you—a bonny wife to cherish, and bairns to your knee—life and love, peace and just dealing and quiet days—or at the other hand but dusty death and black shame to the back of that!"

As a snake strikes, Mundy's hand shot out: he jerked MacGregor's gun from the scabbard and threw it behind him. His face lit up with ferocious joy.

"You prating old windbag! How about it now? I'll be

driven by no man on earth, much less by a wordy old bluffer like you."

"You used other speech but now. Ye are false in war as in love. But I carenae for hard words, so you deal justly with the lassie. Wed her with me to witness, or let her go free."

"Talk to the wind!" said Mundy.

"For the last time, Mundy, give it up! In the name of God!"

"Get off that horse and drag it! I give you your life—you're not worth my killing. Never be seen on the San Quentin again!"

"Mundy——"

"Get off, I say!" Mundy spurred close, his cocked gun swung shoulder high.

"Aweel," said MacGregor. He began to slide off slowly, his right hand on the saddle horn; his left hand went to the gun at his left knee; he thrust it up under Neighbor's neck and fired once, twice—again! Crash of flames, roaring of gun shots: he was on his back, Neighbor's feet were in his ribs; he fired once more, blindly, from under the trampling feet.

Breathless, crushed, he struggled to his knees, the blood pumping from two bullet-holes in his great body. A yard away, Clay Mundy lay on his face, crumpled and still, clutching a smoking gun.

"I didnae touch his face," said MacGregor. He threw both guns behind him; he turned Mundy over and opened his shirt. One wound was in his breast, close beside his heart; another was through the heart. MacGregor looked down upon him.

"The puir, mad, misguided lad!" he said between pain-wrung lips. "Surely he was gone horn-mad with hate and wrong and revenge."

He covered the dead man's face, and straightened the stiffening arms, and sat beside him: he looked at the low sun, the splendor of the western ranges; he held his hand to his own breast to stay the pulsing blood.

"And the puir lassie—she will hear this shameful tale of him! Had I looked forward and killed yonder knave Hame-

rick, she had blamed none but me. 'Twas ill done . . . Ay, but she's young still. She will have a cave and a fire of her own yet."

There was silence a little space, and his hand slipped. Then he opened his dulling eyes:

"Hullo, Central! . . . Give me Body, please. . . . Hullo, Body! Hullo! That you, Body? . . . MacGregor's Soul, speaking. I am going away. Good luck to you—good-by! . . . I don't know where."

ONCE UPON A TIME

CHAPTER I

THE LONG SHIFT

Echoes of the explosion yet volleyed from cliff to cliff; a thin cloud of smoke and dust hung heavily over the shaft mouth. They huddled together on the dump—the four men of the night shift, peacefully asleep a moment since; the young manager, still holding a pen in his nerveless fingers; the blacksmith, the cook, and the Mexican water-carrier—all that were left of the Argonauts.

No one spoke; there was no need. The dynamite, stored in the eighty-foot cross-cut, had exploded; no one knew how or why. The shaft walls had heaved and crushed together; the dump had fallen in for yards; the very hillside had slipped and closed over the spot where the shaft of the Golden Fleece had been. The eight men of the day-shift were buried alive. Working in the further stopes and cross-cuts of the deeper levels, they could hardly have been killed outright. Remained for them the long, slow agony of suffocation—or the mercy of the fire. For there was scarcely room to hope that the explosion had not fired the timber work.

They knew this, these silent men at the pit mouth; knew there was no chance that they could clear away the shaft in time—not if they were eighty instead of eight. To tear away that tangle of shattered rock was a matter of weeks; the air supply in the living grave beneath was a matter of days or hours. They knew, too, that their comrades were even then speaking hopefully of "the boys"; that to the last the prisoners would hold unfaltering trust—in them! And one fell on his face and cried on the name of God—Van Atta, manager and half owner.

"No hope, no hope, no hope!" he sobbed. "We can't save 'em. Keough wanted me to put in a ventilator shaft. I wouldn't—and now I have murdered them! They will wait for us—wait—wait—O God! God! God!"

He was young, inexperienced, half-invalid yet, now brought for the first time face to face with sudden and violent death: small wonder if he broke down for a moment. A moment only—he sprang to his feet, his face new-lighted with hope and energy.

"The old Showdown tunnel! They will remember that—if they are alive they will expect us to break through from there! Keough intended to connect it with Gallery Four on the last level, to save hoisting. I surveyed it then—I know the bearings—we can tear out some kind of a hole.—Come on, men! Oh, my God, we'll do it yet!"

They clambered down the steep, boulder-strewn mountainside, bearing drills, hammers, "spoons," picks, shovels, powder, fuse, caps, water, candles—all needful to begin work.

Near the face, far back in the winding tunnel, Van Atta drove a gad into the hanging wall. "Start from here. Keep an angle of forty-five degrees from the course of the tunnel, and a twenty degree dip. It is twenty-four to twenty-five feet in, and seven feet below us."

"Go!" said Price, holding the starter in place. White began another hole above him.

Van Atta raised his voice to be heard above the beating hammers. "Jones will sharpen steel now and help you later. The work will fall on you five; Charlie and I are out of it. The Mexican boy could do more work than either of us. We three will rig up some sort of makeshift ventilator, move the forge and cook outfit down, muck away for you, cook your meals. Save yourselves for the drills. Tell us what you need, and we will get it. Jones will work our steel bars up into the longest possible set of drills. We'll shoot out till the longest drill will reach, and then drive a hole right through. We can pump in fresh air then, pour down water and coffee and soup, and break out the balance afterwards. If we only had more men! Had we better send some one to San Clemente for help? Or north to the ranches by Red Mesa?"

"Red Mesa is closer, but there may be no one there. It's

forty-five mile to San Clemente," said Lone Miller. "The boy couldn't do it afoot—we can't spare a man. By the time they got back, it might be too late—and the man's work here might make all the difference." He swung his hammer savagely. "But there's two other men besides ourselves on Malibu Knob. Doc Hughes is only five miles from here," he blurted out at last. "He's at the Nymyer copper claim and another Welshman with him. We can do it with them. They just got out from turn. I saw them when I was out hunting yesterday afternoon. Doc is a dirty mutt—a low-down camp-robber. I'll get him yet, the damned scoundrel! . . . Not now. He can break more rock than any man that walks. Send for him. Maybe he'll come," he sneered. "Tell him it's our only chance for help—that we can't break through in time. Tell him I said so—me, Lone Miller—that I asked him to come."

"That's a whisky-bloat's job," said Charlie, the cook. "Keep your men for men's work." He was gone.

"The other monkey is good, too," said Miller. "Not so good as Caradoc Hughes, but a miner. Trust Cousin Jock for that."

Two of the night-shift were Welshmen. "Goeslong, my son," said one, well pleased.

Swiftly the hammers fell, square and true; slipping so easily that the work seemed as effortless as driving tacks. But back and shoulders were in each blow—the tough ash handles bent, the drills sank steadily into the rock. No ordinary toil—their best, and better than their best.

Without, the blacksmith beat a brave tattoo on the glowing steel, sharpening set after set of drills. The starters were a foot long, each succeeding drill five or six inches longer than the preceding one, and slightly narrower at the bit, so that it would follow in the hole. Seven or eight drills made a set, the longest four or five feet. Carefully he wrought, and watched with anxious eye as he plunged the hissing points into the water and, holding them up, saw the temper draw steel-blue and white-specked to the edge.

Meantime the Mexican lad and the manager worked on their improvised ventilating rig—lengths of pipe laid down the tunnel, screwed together, and connected with an extra

bellows set up on the dump. Before they were done, the first shots were fired. Leaving Clovis to finish tightening up the joints, Van Atta went into the tunnel. The candles smoldered faintly through the sickly smoke, where Miller and White worked on a new hole. Williams, on his hands and knees between striker and holder, threw the broken rock to Price, who carried it farther back.

"That's it—that's good!" said Van, screwing a length of hose on his pipe-line to carry the fresh air quite to the front. "Whew! This powder is rank! I'll have fresh air pumped down in a jiffy. You two boys go back to the air till it's your time to drill. I'll get a wheel-barrow and muck away. Don't make the mistake of cutting the drift so small you can't work to advantage—and don't waste time pounding dull steel."

From this time on Clovis or Van pumped in fresh air steadily. Van, at the bellows, in the gathering dusk, glimpsed two speeding forms black against the sky-line. "Oh, good work! Good work, Cooky!" he cried exultingly. "Ten miles, and over that trail! He must have run all the way over!"

A shout went up in the tunnel when Van told his news. "I was afraid something would happen," said Miller. "They might have been away—hunting, maybe. Sundown's the best time for deer."

A burly giant came puffing down the tunnel: Caradoc Hughes, huge, brutal, broad-chested, red-faced, red-haired, bull-necked, thick-lipped. He bellowed strange greetings and shouldered the striker aside. "Le's see, moi son! Taper off a bit!"

"Taake foive," said Davis, following more quietly, as he took the drill from the holder. Caradoc grinned villainously at Miller. "Halloo! Hast thy gun, lad? Spaare moi life a bit, wilt 'ee? Have no time for scrappin' now."

"You're more useful alive, Taffy—just now," replied Miller, without looking up. Doc, chuckling coarsely, polished the drill-head with wicked, smashing blows. *"Whoosh!"* he grunted, expelling his breath violently at each stroke, as he brought the hammer down with all his bulk behind it. "Whoosh!"

Far behind, the cook limped painfully in. Later he brought

steaming coffee and great Dutch ovens full of beef and beans. The bellows worked unceasingly, the wheelbarrow carried the broken rock away. At the front they paired off, changing at frequent intervals, holding and striking alternately. They worked. . . . But the shots were frequent, the charges heavy; the giant-powder fumes—sluggish, stupefying, poisonous—hung in the air in spite of the ventilator, dragged on the men's energies, dulled the onset. Their heads ached relentlessly. As each relay came off, they hurried out to the blessed pure air; and, thinking of the prisoners, entombed and suffocating, stumbled back again to strike with all their manhood behind each blow.

Van, when they went out in the air, made them wrap up warmly, lest their tortured muscles should stiffen. Van sent Charlie to them with food and hot coffee. Van brought water. He was here, there, and everywhere, pumping at the bellows, mucking away, keeping the drift true. The little man of brains anticipated every need; brought powder or fuse already cut and capped; saving a minute here, half a minute there. He loaded and fired the holes, sparing his men so much of the labor and powder smoke. He praised them, cheered them on, kept their hearts up, voiced their pride; till each man nerved himself to utmost effort, thrilled to know that solid rock and stubborn granite were less enduring than his own unchanging will.

And, when he crept back to Charlie and Clovis, it was Van who despised himself, whose heartsick thought was that his feeble body unfitted him to do a man's work on the firing-line. . . . So the night wore on; and ever the hammers rang, the drills bit deep; slowly, steadily, inch by inch, foot by foot, they tore the prison wall away.

As he rested, Caradoc goaded his disdainful enemy with taunt and slur—"Little pot, soon hot"—and such ancestral wit. For a long time Miller made no answer to these rude sallies, but the insults festered. "You know the old saw, Doc," he said at last, with ominous quiet. "The Almighty made some men big and some small, but Colonel Colt evened things up. Best think it over."

After each shot the crews went to the drilling, leaving the muckers to work out rock loosened by previous shots with

pick and gad, straightening the uneven walls and roof as best they could. Their desperate haste invited disaster. It came before dawn. White was holding for Williams, when a heavy rock jarred from the roof and fell on the striker's shoulder. The hammer, glancing from the drill head, crushed the holder's hand to mangled flesh. The work stopped. White rose unsteadily. "Keep a-hummin'—keep the hammers going," he said, as he started out, dizzy and sick. Williams, in scarce less distress for his unlucky blow, followed him.

"Bide a bit!" bellowed Caradoc. "Harken! I hear summat! God's love, hear that! There's salve for thy hurrt, lad! They're alive, they're alive, I tell 'ee! Happen the heat's drivin' 'em down bottom by way o' the winze!"

Tap-tap-tap! Muffled and dull and hollow it sounded from the rock before them. Tap-tap-tap! Doc snatched his hammer and thundered on the drill head. "They livin'!" he roared. "Seven feet an' more we've made this night, and fair gettin' limbered up a bit!"

"I'll eat a bite and go to town after help," said White, as Van bandaged his hand. "I'm no good here, but I can walk. I tell you these men are fagged. I ought to know. If you get close enough to drill a hole through, 'twill be all. The strain will be over, and every mother's son'll drop in his tracks. I'll send enough men from town to tear out that last ten feet by the roots."

"You can't, man. You're tired out and suffering. There is at least one bone broken in your hand. You'll give out."

"I—I wasn't aiming to walk on my hands, you know. Run along now. I'm twenty-one past, and it is my job to walk across Malibu Flat this day. If you look across the desert to San Clemente about dark, there'll be a big light on Ghost Mountain to let you know I made it. So-long!" He filled a canteen and went to do his part: not the least where each did well.

The long weary day dragged as they toiled at their endless task. The Mexican lad loaded his patient burros with kegs and went to the spring for water. Before noon Van Atta was on the verge of collapse. The others forced him to quit his part in the mucking. "Else will us bind 'ee handfast," observed Caradoc. "Happen us'll need thy brains yet, lad. Will

be there with t' brawn—do 'ee keep care o' the only head here that's worth owt." So Van, cursing and shamed, cleaned out the holes when "mud" clogged them, picked out the followers, loaded and fired the holes, and sometimes took a short spell at pumping; while Charlie and Clovis stacked up no more rock, for lack of time, but wheeled it far down the tunnel and dumped it.

The incessant clangor of steel on ringing steel—hammer and hold, hold and hammer—mud! Clean—change drills, hammer! Load, fire—clean away—room for the hammers! The air was hot, foul, and intolerable, from candles, steaming breath and dripping bodies, dust and powder fumes. Hour after hour they drove home the assault; stripped to the waist, soaked and streaked with sweat and dust; with fingers cramped from gripping on hammer and drill; with finger-joints that cracked and bled, wrists bruised and swollen from jarring blows. The rough and calloused hands were blistering now; eyes were red-rimmed and sunken, faces haggard and drawn; back, muscles and joints strained and sore; worse than all, the powder headache throbbed at their temples with torture intolerable. . . . But the brave music of clashing steel rang steadily, clear, unfaltering, where flesh and blood flung itself at the everlasting hill.

A muffled roar came from the heart of the rock. The prisoners were working toward them.

"That's bad," said Van. "They'll make the air worse with every shot—and they can't hit our drift short of a miracle. They are lessening their chances."

"I don't rightly know that," said Caradoc. "Was on the last shift in Gallery Foar, myself. Was a horse there, I moind, hard as the Gaates o' Hell. Happen they'll smash that up and save us mony the weary blow."

The terrible strain began to tell. But Caradoc and his indomitable foe kept the heartbreaking pace hour after hour. Price was deadly sick, bleeding from nose and mouth; Williams' hurt shoulder was stiffened till striking was out of the question for him. So these two held. The others kept on pluckily, but their strength was leaving them. Inexorable Nature was extorting punishment for her outraged laws: the end was near, of men or task. The shifts were timed no

longer. Each man kept up the savage hammering till he felt his strength fail; and as he stepped back, breathless, a silent spectre behind him rose up and took his place.

From the steel bars Jones fashioned a set of twenty-four drills, with all his cunning and loving care on every point; a hair's-breadth difference between the bits, the longest drill twelve feet, its bit barely wider than the octagonal steel; he welded rods of iron for spoons of suitable lengths. They made the last few feet of the drift wider and higher than the rest, to have ample room for double drilling. At sundown they set off the last shots. They had torn out fourteen feet; they must drill a hole through the eleven-foot wall that remained. They had scarcely started when Clovis came, pouring out a torrent of voluble Spanish. A fire blazed on Ghost Mountain; help was coming.

One thing was left to fear. Thrice they had heard the muffled shots from within. Since then there had been no sign. Were the prisoners dead, or had they seen the unwisdom of further exhaustion of the air?

"They'll be too far gone to work, hours before they actually suffocate," said Van. "We'll be in time, please God!"

They called up every reserve that pride or hope or fear could bring. Two men struck at once, the hammers following each other so swiftly that it seemed impossible for the holder to turn the drill between blows.

"Scant mercy on they beasties this night," said Price. "They'll coom to t'hill-foot in foar hours. Near two they'll need to win oop t'hill—'tis mortal steep, an' they beasties'll be jaded sore. Will be in season for t' Graveyard shift."

"Not so—coom midnight will be full soon. 'Tis a sandy desert and a weary hill by night."

"Be't midnight, then. Williams, moi son, canst hold t'drill alone? I be fair rested oop by now, and can pound a bit. Us'll burn no more powder, an' t'air will clear oop ere long."

"Good for you, Cousin Jock!" said Miller heartily. By tacit consent Miller and Caradoc worked together. It depended on them—and they knew it. Shoulder to shoulder, blow for blow, they set their faces grimly to such work as few are called to do.

Neither Charlie nor Van Atta could be trusted to hold—

for them to strike would be simply loss of time. The hole must be driven absolutely true, or the drill would bind, and they would have to begin again. At intervals one of the others would hold, giving Williams a few minutes' respite to straighten his aching back and his cramped and stiffened fingers. Van Atta cleaned the hole and called the depth. Ten inches; twenty—thirty—fifty—"Sixty inches!" he called exultingly. "An inch every two minutes, after all these hours! The world can't beat it!"

The drill "jumped" with crash and jar; Miller's hammer just missed Williams' hand, and Doc's, closely following, was checked in mid-air by a violent effort. The holder drew the drill and turned the point to the light. An inch was broken from the bit; any succeeding drill would batter and break at once; the hole was lost.

A despairing silence: Williams fell against the wall and hid his eyes. Doc's head dropped over on his hairy chest. Miller's face was ghastly. . . . Van Atta rose weakly, picked up the starter, sank on one knee, with his face to the breast; holding the drill in place beside the lost hole, just above his shoulder, his eyes on the bit, he waited. A second—and Miller's hammer crashed down. *Clang! Clang! Clang!*

"God's blood!" Red with shame, the giant sprang up and showered down blow on mighty blow. A murmur ran around the circle; the little band closed grimly to the final test. Jones shaped the broken drill again and hurried back to bear his part in the renewed attack. The two enemies were doing the work. The others worked gallantly—but the leaders were making five inches to their two. What matter, where each gave his best? Five inches—ten—thirty—forty!

At fifty inches Price gave way, totally unable to do more. When Caradoc and Miller stepped back, breathless, Jones and Davis tapped away doggedly, but there was no force to their blows.

The big Welshman had bitten his lip; blood trickled from his mouth as he grinned at his mate. 'Tis oop to us now. A rare team we make—and good for them beyond!"

Miller nodded. There was no contempt in his glance now. Truly, this was a man; fit to stand to a king's back, though he fought for his crown—strong of heart and arm—this man

he had dared despise. Foot to foot, blow for blow, unyielding, unswerving, they stood up to the tremendous task. Sixty—seventy! Davis and Jones made a last desperate spurt and fell back, exhausted, utterly forspent. Seventy-five!—*Miller and Hughes!*

They planted their feet firmly and looked into each other's eyes as they began again. Miller's hammer kept the appalling pace, gave no sign that his strength was failing—ebbing away with every blow. . . . Somewhere, out in the far-off world, there was music and light and laughter. Perhaps he, too, had known pleasure, running streams that laughed in the sunshine, the free winds of heaven—youth—love—rest. It might have been so—long, long since. He did not know. Life had dwindled to these narrowing, flinty walls, this dim-litten circle, with its wavering center of steel where they must strike—strike hard! He and Doc—good old Doc—brave Doc! . . . Something stirred in the shadows behind—far-off, meaningless voices reached him over the rising clangor of steel. . . . Men, perhaps. If they would go away. . . . They drew his reeling senses from the shining steel, that he must strike—strike hard! Eighty—eighty-five—ninety!

Without warning, Miller pitched over on his face, unconscious. Their best was down. What lay in the silence beyond that granite wall?

Caradoc leaned heavily against the wall while they bore his fallen foe away. "Look to him—'tis a man!" he said. There was no triumph in his tones. He staggered forward. *"Whoosh!"* he grunted, as he struck out. *"Whoosh!"*

His eyes were sunken in his head, his blotched and purple face was fallen in; his sobbing breath whistled between his clenched teeth, his breast heaved almost to bursting; but his mighty shoulders drove home the drill. Ninety-five inches—a hundred! And still that tireless hammer rose and fell!

"Easy—mud—mud!" yelled Price, at the drill. "It's done! We've struck their drift!"

A dozen light taps, and the drill leaped through. The incredible had happened. They had struck the side wall of the counter-drift made by the prisoners on pure guess. They pulled out the drill. A rush of foul, sickening air followed. Price shouted down the hole. A mumbled response came

back. Van Atta thrust the nozzle of the hose onto the hole, stuffed his handkerchief around it to keep it tight, and ran down the tunnel. Halfway out he met Charlie.

"Run!" he gasped. "We're through—they're alive; all of 'em! Pump—pump hard!"

Any San Clemente man will tell you the rest. Except this:

"Miller," said Caradoc, "wast roight. I robbed thy camp. Will take nowt more o' thine—nor no man's, if so be I can think betoimes. T'is an old habit wi' me. But 'tis a shameful thing to do—for him as stood in moi shoes this night. Lad . . . wilt shake hands wi' a thief?"

"You can't steal anything of mine, Doc. What's mine is yours. God! How you worked—and were good for more, when I fell over like a baby."

"Toosh! Goeslong, moi son! Didst thy part, little Hop-o'-moi-thumb. Pounded steel two hours afore e'er I began. Shoulds't ha' been a Welshman!"

CHAPTER II

CHEERFUL LAND

Mr. Emil James rode down the main street of San Clemente in the bright mid-morning sun. From open doors a flourish of friendly hands kept pace with him. Emil waved gay return. Tippytoes, absurd but admirable horse, cocked ears to left or right at each open door and tossed his forelock in cheerful salutation of his own.

Mr. Emil James, the bright sun, the street of open doors—these deserve separate consideration. Emil was a tall man with a long, serious face, only prevented from large mirth by reasons of state. His eyes were tranquil, wide, deep-blue and steady; he wore a grizzly-gray mustache and a long, thin, straight nose. The first was trimmed and disciplined, a mustache that knew its place; and Mr. James kept on intimate terms with the second. It was his habit, in perplexity or deliberation, to look down his nose for counsel. He did not squint, he merely glanced: a feat possible only because his eyes were so wide apart and his nose so very long. For the rest, he was a youngerly man who looked, and may have been, from thirty to forty or fifty.

He rode loose-reined and gently swaying, irresistibly giving the effect of one who sits at cheerful ease upon a shaded porch with luxurious feet upon a railing; relaxing, after stirring hurly-burly, to a little well-earned repose.

The blue eyes of Mr. James, twinkling deep beneath that shaded brim, made inevitable the porch-thought, just as his loose-limbed comfort suggested the oldest and best-beloved of easy-chairs. The gait was a walk, but it was a swinging walk, roguish, jaunty and whimsical; a walk which was apparently on the point of breaking into a jig; a knowing walk, cheerful and alert, plainly expecting some brisk adventure at any turn and confident of a creditable part in such joyous hazard as might arise.

Quite spontaneously and of his own motion, the Tippytoes

horse has crowded into the story with Mr. James; which is as it should be. For this was a land of a strong white sun and cloudless skies, therefore of scant water and vast distances; where a horse and his rider are one.

No bully's horse ever met the world with such friendly eyes as Tippytoes; no bigot's horse would dare such rakish impudence of bearing; no weakling's horse could ever manage that joyous swagger. With every careless, confident line and motion, Tippytoes proclaimed his assurance that he carried a man.

That bright sun vouched for Emil's broad hat-brim and made it credible. The great mountains made soft that hat-brim that it might be turned back when he rode in their cool and friendly shelter; just as the long dun reaches of Malibu Flat made soft that hat-brim, that it might bend to the strong winds which inhabit such dim immensities.

Wherever the eye might turn it fell on great mountains, even when you woke in the starlit night: mountains of all colors, of colors that changed with the changing hours, crimson-edged against the rising sun or black against the dawn; gray, brown or blue-black of morning hours, dwindled and dim in the blaze of noon, neutral and smudged.

They were colors and shapes that changed and flowed with every change of angle or distance. Those work-day grays or browns melted with the miles to strong and nameless hues—rich, warm, crude, barbaric. But if you looked westward in the late afternoon to those raw and gaudy hills, the cool, deep shadows were trembling lilac, edged with rose and sparkled with gold-dust; the far-seen hills were purple or misty blue; they flamed in the magic sunset to iridescent opal and all the sea-shell splendor of dreams: they rose high in the iron twilight, mighty and magnified, serene with promise and comfort and refuge.—"I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help."

On Emil's right hand, the silent levels of Malibu Flat lay spectral and somber, rising from northern nothingness and haze, stretching on and on across the world, fading again to nothingness in the south.

Across the desert, dim and far, the Continental Divide rimmed out the west—a long wall, uneven and unbroken, range

after bristling range in a linked and welded chain: the purple island-cones of Datil, the nearer Hueco, the low red blaze of Red Mesa, the blue Malibu, Copa de Oro. This particular vertebra in the backbone of the Continent was known locally as Malibu Range, taking its name from the Malibu proper. Jointed and socketed with it, the Black Range made a lavender line along the south.

Straight across, where the Malibu was blue beyond the desert, thin, tenuous silhouettes of palest amethyst peered dim and ghostly over the Malibu wall: the double peaks of San Quentin, a long day further in the western deeps.

Near by, at Emil's back, the foursquare bulk of Pinetop mountain gloomed above the north and the east: so near, the pine trees on the crest showed plain against the sky-line, inch-long and feather-slight.

Nearer, the high sharp cone of San Clemente Peak towered at his left: San Clemente Gap was notched deep beneath it. And from that Gap, San Clemente Draw made a steep semicircle around the base of Ghost Mountain, where tunnels gophered and mine dumps sprawled, where trail and road zigzagged doubtfully to derrick and dump.

Close beyond Ghost Mountain and high above it, upleaping from illimitable chasms between, the magic crest of Fantasia Range swung across the sky with rush and onsweep, dominating day and night and dream.

There were those who found these vast horizons depressing and desolate, who took no healing of the hills, who miscalled that bright-cheering sun as a glaring sun, a flaming sun in a copper sky: so dull and gray their wonted skies, so leaden, sullen and unkind.

Not San Clemente. San Clemente found in these great spaces the lure of hope, new ventures, unguessed delights; knew that kindly sun as the giver of life, oppressor of gloom and despair, the underwriter of joy.

It might be admitted by San Clemente, without prejudice, that the sun was warmish, perhaps, around midday or thereabouts. But San Clemente had an assortment of sound reasons to fear no more the heat o' the sun.

First, the cowmen. They worked like demons of the pit at roundup time, cool spring or cool fall. But cattle could not

be worked in summer. It was too hot—for the cattle. Nor in winter, which was too cold—for the cattle. These seasons were therefore set apart by all cattlemen as a half-life of gentle divertisement.

Ten-mule teams, twenty-mule teams, hauled ore through the Gap, and across the eastern desert, variously known as Magdalena Valley or Magdalena Plain. Ridgepole, terminus of a railroad of sorts, branch of a jerkwater branch, was their journey's end. They brought back supplies and machinery on the return trip.

These freighters—Mexicans all—drove by night, as a matter of course. The round trip took six days. Monday morning, load with ore and pull up to San Clemente ranch, the water nearest the Gap: cross the Gap at twilight, then a long night drive, nooning from eight to five in the middle of Magdalena Plains on Tuesday, Ridgepole at Wednesday breakfast time, ore in the cars Wednesday night, load up return freight on Thursday morning, unload it at San Clemente Saturday night: Sunday for *monte* and other delights of home. Freighters thought of the sun largely as a reliable sedative and aid to sleep.

The miners worked underground. This statement might be classed as a truism: but so many of us are unfamiliar with that underworld, that the story hopes it may be pardoned for underscoring so obvious a fact. The sun concerned miners chiefly as something which made shade pleasant.

The miners were Cornishmen, Welshmen and a few Irish—even a few Americans. San Clemente, it will be seen, was cosmopolitan. They worked in three shifts, from seven in the morning to three in the afternoon, from three to eleven, from eleven at night till seven in the morning: eight hours' work, eight hours' sleep, eight hours for their very own, to be squandered or banked. Every two weeks they changed shifts in rotation.

Business San Clemente transacted that busy-ness within doors. The leisure of San Clemente, the getting-on people, the up-and-coming people, the eastern contingent—capitalists, promoters, pleasure-seekers and health-seekers—dwelt magnificently in "Chautauqua," braced and morally uplifted by straight streets. The story believes that the Chautauquans

themselves referred to their rightangular suburb as "the North Side." Needless to state, the Chautauquans were independent alike of exertion and of the sun. As a whole, San Clemente was nocturnal of habit and swore by the sun. The newer transients did otherwise.

Ridgepole stage-drivers were exceptions. The stage arrived at Ridgepole, and left that gateway town, to suit the convenience of a mixed train which frequently made connections at Saragossa with north-bound and south-bound passenger trains, which in turn were timed for close connection with the haughty Flyers on the main lines at Albuquerque or El Paso. Because of this arbitrary and thrice-removed fixing of hours, the Ridgepole stage went through by daylight. Hueco and Datil stages, running respectively west and northwest from San Clemente, were night lines.

The street of open doors was a long street, a leisurely street, a straggling street: above all, a tolerant street. The old wagon road followed closely the semicircle of San Clemente Draw around the foot of Ghost Mountain; the new and tolerant street made the same wide circling. Why not? Why be needlessly precise and prim and rectilinear? The road was a fine old road, its history, trail and road, such as the street delighted to honor. Besides, it was a shallow dig to water, near the draw: why go higher to dig deeper? Besides, again, Sundown Ridge—low, rolling and broken—paralleled at once the winding draw, the old road, and the flowing lines of Ghost Mountain. A curving street made harmony with such environment; a straight street would be a jarring discord; and the street had no mind to make itself unpleasant, thank you. The very name of it was Roundabout: with such a name, how could a street be built straight?

That the doors of this tolerant street were open was not altogether due to the warmth of the climate. The story hopes that so much will have been guessed: that this tolerant and whimsical street was also a highly allegorical street: that the open doors were in some part a symbol and a sign of friendliness and welcome. If it has not been guessed, it is here expressly stated.

But if Roundabout Street was friendly, it had its own reticence; each house was set well back from the road. Super-

ficial people thought this was because of the dust. But each house also kept at a generous distance from its neighbors: and the cause of that was not dust. It was a large desire for independence, privacy and elbow room.

At the upper end of the street, nearest the gateway to the eastern desert, stood the immemorial San Clemente Ranch, hidden and fenced by deep and impenetrable shade of ancient cottonwoods.

The long row of one-storied rooms, the long, low stables and the corrals, were built in one continuous wall, forming a great quadrangle of massive adobe. All windows and doors faced on the enclosed courtyards. The outer walls, house, stable, and corrals, were four feet thick for as high as a man's head. The upper wall was two feet thick, pierced near the top by loopholes. The two-foot bench made within by the offset was for riflemen to stand upon in war. In peace it made a desirable shelf, that took near to four hundred yards to complete the square. This had been a Gibraltar among ranches in the old Apache days, a virgin fortress famed by interminable songs of liquid, feminine, soft-syllabled Spanish.

On the western side once swung a mighty gate of double valves, bullet-proof, framed of hewn logs from Pinetop. Entering, in those old days, you turned at a right angle and rode down a titanic corridor, between walls ten feet high; to where, beyond the reach of any slantwise bullet through the outer gate, a second gateway turned through the inner wall.

The old ranch had long since been made base and headquarters for the freight teams, and was now named anew as "Chihuahua." Opposite the old outer portal, the inner wall was pierced for a straight road and now crumbled to unrepaired decay: the massive war-doors were long discarded for light-swinging peaceful gates that a child might open.

Through freighters, too, for whom San Clemente was a way station, made this a camping station and half-way house. Their schedules were semi-occasional: their westwise roads radiated fan-wise from San Clemente Gap; they brought from the long Malibu Range what ore was rich enough to stand the long haul; in clipping-time, great bags of mohair from San Todos, wool from Fuentes.

Above the song-haunted cottonwoods rose the high bell-

tower of San Clemente Church—old, but younger than the ranch by near a century. "The groves were God's first temples": mass and marriage and solemn service for the dead had been held under those old trees for generations before ever the church was built.

On Roundabout Street, on the Plaza of Business-town, on the low hills of compact Chautauqua, the comparative age of any building was accurately recorded by the size of its tributary cottonwood trees; swiftest of growth of all shade trees, dearest to the desert dweller.

Because the men outnumbered the women by about three or thirteen to one, San Clemente ran largely to boarding houses. For the same reason, the town supported a surprisingly good hotel, The Ugly Duckling, which took up nearly all the south side of the Plaza.

The proprietor of the Duckling was a sentimental Dane; hence the name, a compliment at once to his greatest compatriot and to his own skill as purveyor of comfort. Thirty years back, half of San Clemente was persistent to know the young Dane as Andy Anderson: the other half clung stubbornly to Ole Oleson. They had compromised on Oleander. The young Dane had grown to be an old American now; as Oleander he was pillar and landmark in San Clemente; but his own name was a forgotten thing.

The Duckling was built of adobe. It was one story high and one room wide: nobody knew exactly how long it was. Upended, it would have made a notable skyscraper. Besides the hotel, the building housed the Post Office, the Telephone Exchange, three Stage-lines and sundry offices of mining companies, and the like. Even so, the Duckling bedrooms had never all been filled at once.

The long shady verandah of the Duckling was, *ex officio*, the San Clemente Club. Even at this early hour a dozen men utilized that shady comfort: half as many saddled horses, with dangling reins, visited together under the Duckling cottonwoods. Tippytoes slanted his eager ears that way.

Emil folded his hands on the saddle-horn and regarded the verandah benevolently.

"This is a fine bunch," he said.

The bunch gave vigorous and varied assent to this proposition: except Keough, who dented his nose in sneering silence,

and Old Man Gibson, who snorted. It was a representative gathering, miners and freighters aside. First were young Billy Armstrong and "Pretty Pierre" Hines of Chautauqua. For the cattle interests were Owen Quinliven, half owner of the Double Dee brand, a huge, brindled, freckle-faced ex-miner; Steve Thompson, smooth-faced and bright-eyed, who gave the Hook-and-Ladder; and burly, surly Gibson—Old Man Gibson of the Berenda. The townsmen were represented by Cox, editor of *The Inland Empire;* black-browed Keough of the telephone exchange; Baker, manager of the three stage lines; Max Goldenburg of the New York Store; serious, flaxen-bearded, square-faced Oleander himself; and the quiet professional gentleman known as "Monte." The twelfth chair-warmer was Ed Dowlin, unclassified; lumberman, cattleman, mine owner and Free Lance.

"I hear," said Emil, addressing Keough, "that you had a right smart doings over on the Malibu last week. Got out of it lucky, didn't you?"

"You may think so," said Keough bitterly. "I fail to see it."

Emil took counsel with his nose.

"Why, you got 'em all out alive and unhurt, didn't you?"

"Including the fool that set off the powder." Keough's white and bloodless face flamed to sudden red. Emil exchanged a glance with Dowlin. Dowlin arched an eyebrow.

"He makes me sick, Keough does. All he thinks of is the money he lost." Quinliven spat the words from his mouth: he had been trapped in mines himself.

"Get down and look at your saddle," suggested Billy. "Maybe somebody'll buy you a cigar. Ed, you do it."

Emil shook his head. "Just now I'm looking for that new N 8 person. Anybody know where he is?"

Oleander jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "Out in the corral, getting Pat to show him how to throw a diamond hitch."

"Some boy," said Steve approvingly. "Yesterday he pestered Spencer into taking him all through the Torpedo and had him explain all about minin', from A to Izzard. Day before that he borrowed that little Redlegs outlaw hawse of mine and started in to learn how to stay topside, and how about it. Perseverin' cuss! I'd be ashamed to say how many times that little roan devil piled him. I took 'em over in a

sandy draw, so there wasn't much chance for the kid to get hurt, and he stuck to it till he could ride him slick. The old scoundrel was pitchin' right peart, too. John Sayles, he got skinned up some, but he sure was enjoyin' himself a heap. He'll make a hand."

"He came also to me for a leetle eenstruction," said Monte diffidently. "He ees ver' deeligent es-cholar."

"Well, now, this is very gratifying," said Emil, "and goes to show that you never can tell. Why, when he climbed out of the stage in them dizzy duds, I didn't nowise pick him for a live one. Very next day I found him up on the wagon road learnin' how to hold a drill. My mistake. I'll go get him."

He raised his bridle hand and rode on into the corral. There, flushed and perspiring, John Sayles Watterson, Jr., late of Princeton University, vas engaged in packing two empty goods-boxes upon a patient and sleepy gray burro. In this design he was aided and abetted by old Pat Nunn.

"'Lo, Pat! Howdy, young man!"

"Oh, good-day! Mr. James, isn't it?"

"Hello, yourself! Anything wanted?" said old Pat.

"A few words with the middle-aged one, *poco tiempo*. No hurry; go through with your lesson."

"There! That's solid! Good hitch for heavy stuff, the diamond is," said Old Pat, a little later. "But it takes two men to throw it. You get Emil to show you the Lost Cowboy. And a plain N-hitch is good enough for just a roll of bedding and such. Here's your man, Emil. Go to him. I'll drag it."

"Nothing confidential, Pat—stick around. Now then, young man, I understand you're going to make a visit to the N 8 ranch, and are waiting for a chance to get out there. Is that right?"

"Right as rain."

"All aboard, then. I am now organizing a little expedition for the pursuit of happiness, and you are hereby invited to make one of two. I'm the other one."

"Done with you. How do we go? Horseback? When do we start?"

"We go in the slickest little covered spring wagon you ever rolled your eagle eye over," said Emil, "and we start from my place soon this evenin'—about half-past four. Horseback across Malibu Flat is too long a trip for a new beginner."

"Yours truly, and thank you kindly," said John Sayles. "I'll hire a rig from the hotel to take me and my traps to your ranch."

"Hire a pig with three long tushes!" said Emil. "Borrow yourself a horse from some one. Pat will loan you a horse—any one will. Stick your shiny new saddle on him, wrap a change of clothes in a slicker and tie it behind, strap your rifle under your leg and come along. You leave your other plunder here at the hotel and Oleander will send it out the next time the ranch wagon comes for supplies."

"But how will I get Mr. Nunn's horse back to him?"

"Shucks! You turn him loose and he'll come straight home. Then you hurl your saddle in my wagon. Some time to-morrow night I'll set you down at Fuentes. You can get another horse there and ride him to the N 8 ranch. It's only twenty miles, and plain landmarks to ride for. Then you can turn that horse loose, too. Come along. You have got fifteen minutes to organize yourself. We'll shack along over to the Square and Compass, sleep while it's hot, and start this evening."

"Where you going to, your own self, Emil?" asked old Pat.

"Over on the Malibu—just rammin' around."

At the upper end of Roundabout, young Watterson reined in and turned for a last look at the straggling town and the headlong hills beyond. The bells of San Clemente shook *terce* from the old church tower.

"Yes," said Emil, "horses are sure intelligent."

"How so? I don't get you."

"Son, you're going to try ranchin' one small spell, you tell me. Listen now: when they send you out to hunt saddle horses, you ride straight to the likeliest and finest-looking glade you know. You'll find 'em there, if there's any grass there at all. Horses *like* beautiful places. They appreciate them. Humans is just the same way. San Clemente, now: it imagines it is here because of the mines. All bosh: people found the mines just as an excuse for staying here. Even finer country on the east side, though, where all our ranches are. I'll build a town there some day, when the railroad comes. Yes, I will—you'll see! In the meantime old San Clemente is the most beautiful town I know.

"Take Ridgepole now—she's our rival. She's got richer mines and more of 'em, mines that have proved their stayin'

qualities. She's got a railroad; we're handicapped by forty-five mile of blisterin', hell-roarin' desert. But San Clemente has double the people. 'Cause why? They don't know, bless your heart—the San Clemente folks don't. But I'll tell you: It's the pull of the big old mountain yonder, and little Ghost Mountain and the little parks of cedar and live oak and the sleepy curves of the draw. Yessir!

"Mighty nice people, too—most of 'em is. A few mean ones, like that white-faced fiend of a Keough—stewin' about a little dirty money when men's lives were at stake. That's how you can pick the bad ones, kid—by the value they set on money. You'll find some several swine in San Clemente, if you keep your eye on the hog trough. Let's go!"

"Matches," said Emil James, slowly and seriously, counting his fingers by way of tally—"matches, coffee, coffee-pot, sugar, tincow, tin cups and spoons—that's coffee." As he spoke he carefully packed the objects named on the shelves of the chuck-box, misses' and children's size, of "the slickest little spring wagon."

That spring wagon was the especial pride and comfort of Emil's heart. When you learn that he kept it painted and sheltered you will know—if you are a frontiersman—just where that little wagon stood in Emil's affections.

It was wrought by the best skill under Emil's jealous supervision; built to be both light and strong. Six woods went to the making of it—hickory, oak, tough hornbeam, black birch, whitewood—clear stock, straight grained—and gnarled Bois d'Arc for the hubs: all seasoned for seven years, and kiln dried to stand up in the dry air of the desert. The highest quality of iron and steel went to the fittings, the toughest and easiest of springs. The wagon bed, framed and panelled for lightness, had no nail or screw in it; cunningly joined by mortise, tenon, dowel and dovetail and housed joints: all locked to place by long and slender bolts at the four corners. A touch on the strong footbrake locked the wheels: and there was a practicable step in front of the front wheel.

Where the tail-gate might have been, the chuck box was "built in" to avoid superfluous weight, floor and sides of the wagon box being also floor and sides of the chuckbox. Be-

tween chuckbox and front and the only seat, the wagon box flared over the wheels, after the fashion of a hay rigging, just long enough and wide enough to accommodate a light set of bed springs. The deep space beneath it was for promiscuous cargo. Under the lazyback spring seat was a low oaken water-tank, also "built in"; doing away with the customary water-kegs, usually slung at the sides of such a wagon by iron straps.

The whole was surmounted by a ribbed top, braced and firm, leather covered. There were light racks and straps at the top for clothing or small effects: there were leather side curtains, with pockets in them, marvelous because they would go up and stay up, or come down and stay down; and there was also that rarest of luxuries, a lantern that would give light.

"Bacon, frying-pan, knives, forks and plates—that's bacon. Flour, water, salt, baking powder, lard, dutchoven—that's bread. Beans, canned truck, spuds, pepper—that's extrys."

"Don't forget the water for potatoes," prompted young Mr. Watterson anxiously. "Or are you reciting that little ditty to exercise your lungs?"

"Son, if this is delayin' you any," said Emil benignly, "try to put up with it, will you? I'm considerable old maidish and set in my ways. And I can tell you something useful. May I call you John Sayles Watterson, Junior? I like the sound of that. It feels good in my goozle."

"Go as far as you like."

"All right! John Sayles Watterson, Junior: I have twice heard you strongly voice opinion that most men in this country do things well. It is true. We admit it. And now I am to tell you why. It is because a man in this country is always trying for two things: to be his own foreman, who says what now and next to do, and to be his own inspector, to see that before he quits he makes a good job of it. I'm inspecting: and I don't want any attention distracted. You keep still! . . . Shot gun and shells—that's quail and rabbits. Rifle and cartridges—that's venison. Blankets—that's bed. Your saddle and truck—that's under the bedsprings. Canteens, water-bucket, hobbles, ropes, nosebags—that's sundries. Corn for horses—that's good. Water—that's life. That's all. Let's go!—There! I near forgot the axle-grease!"

CHAPTER III

MALIBU FLAT

PINTO was a red horse, broad-belted with white. He wore a white shirt-front and white stockings, outsize, carelessly gartered. He was also slashed and spangled and harlequin-checked with white as to head, neck, shoulders, side, flank and hip.

Paint was white, splashed with red; and afterward splattered with shakings from the brush. Moreover, to avoid monotony, he was freckled with little brown spots, and a long, narrow, irregular splotch of jet black criss-crossed down his off hip and thigh. Long curly tail, long curly mane were delicate cream. Just for a surprise, both ears were one color, a modest red. Then, while you were off your guard, one eye was black and the other a startling blue. John Sayles jumped when he came upon that blue eye unawares.

They made a sprightly team, worthy of the wondrous wagon. Emil had matched them with loving care, picking from his *caballada* of six hundred head. Their gaits were frisk, scamper and scurry: for town work they could saunter and strut.

They now wore an expression singularly care-free; they exchanged a knowing glance which said so plainly that they tolerated the harness only because of some private designs of their own, that John Sayles, intercepting that message by chance, felt like an eavesdropper.

There was a preliminary egg-dance; they scrambled back through the Gap, they turned sharply to the right on a faint and little-used road and scudded down the gentle slope of a long winding ridge, carpeted with a turf of short yellow grass, and neighbored by a thousand yellow ridges precisely like it. Then John Sayles began to see how the desert had fooled him. Malibu Flat was not flat at all.

Seen from town, through the low gaps between the hillocks of Sundown Ridge, the plain had appeared to be absolutely level and either brown or of a dull slate color. John Sayles saw now that it was a wrinkled slope of gentle ridges for rather more than halfway across, all keeping the same long easy grade down to a narrow and insignificant gray strip near the middle, after which it immediately began to rise toward the other side in a shorter and steeper slope—a dark brown slope.

John Sayles dismissed Malibu Flat from his attention, rather disappointed, and turned to ask a few questions about the little bunches of cattle they passed, whose were they and where did they water—when, all at once, under their very feet the ridge broke away to yawning deeps. Below them stretched a red sandstone maze of foothills, heaped and tumbled: unseen before because the highest top of them was lower than the smooth ridge country.

The wagon road plunged and dived down the ridge-end, rope-walked a hog-back, twisted and squirmed through the red hills to a deep, winding cañon. And presently the cañon walls grew lower; another sharp bend and they came out upon a broad sea of plain, treeless, gray with scattered bunch grass, dotted with cattle and bands of horses; a plain that filled the horizon; that far-off brown slope was now a brown ribbon at the base of the Malibu.

After a little, their faint and grass-grown track joined a big, plain road, which bore quartering across the plain to the northwest.

"This is the Hueco-Datil road," said Emil. "We follow it as far as the third stage-station, so we can water the horses at midnight. Then we turn straight across."

The sun was low above the Malibu; the cool night wind began to rise. The horses snorted cheerfully and settled to a brisk jog. Far ahead—whenever the wagon topped a ground-swell—a little green streak of low brush showed in a thin line of fuzz.

"The first station is behind us, way back where the stage road left the hills, maybe five mile before we come into it," added Emil. "We're making right good time."

John Sayles looked back and marveled. The huddled red

foothills were an insignificant splash, blazing low in the level light of sunset. Above, that easy slope of smooth ridges was unbelievably steep, merging indistinguishable with the mountain mass to which it made plinth and pedestal; Ghost Mountain was only a thin wraith-outline; beyond, Fantasia Range soared to incredible heights against the turquoise sky. Fascinated, the boy watched the shadow of the world creep over the plain and up the steeps, saw sunset hide in the crags and linger on the flame-tipped crest. The swift twilight came on with a rush.

John Sayles sighed and came back to the front seat. The thin line of brush met them halfway. They drove into it; without warning, all the world was a bush-dotted wilderness of white chalk-hills, rippling in low waves. The broad plain was gone. Nothing was left but the far mountains and the endless sink and swell of billowing chalk. The short twilight passed in a breath; the stars blazed out.

Clouds of white dust lifted with the wheels: they gritted in the chalk-ruts, they lurched in chuckholes: the team slowed to a plodding walk. The black bulk of Pinetop shouldered into the desert and crowded the stage road further out. They came to a mile-wide sunken valley, lush with thick grass. This was the Sinks of the Percha: the lights of the second stage station twinkled across its deeps. They passed it, they climbed out of the sink and came to a good footing and a rolling country: they see-sawed up and down or wound between the little hills. It was near midnight when they watered at the third stage-station. They left the stage-road here, turning sharply to the left. John Sayles, at Emil's urging, stretched out on the spring bed. The last sound he heard was the wheels crunching through sand.

Emil stopped the wagon at two in the morning, to make camp for the three vital hours, from two to five, when strength of horse and man is at lowest ebb. John Sayles roused up, helped to unharness and hobble, and crawled sleepily back to bed. At the first streak of dawn they pushed on again through endless undulations of sandhills, horse-high with gray-green and spicy sagebrush.

The swift daylight grew: and John Sayles was something disconcerted to find that La Fantasia was no further away

than at sunset, while the Malibu was no nearer. There was only one proof of progress: That thin gray streak was wider now, dead ahead and clear-seen in the cool light of morning. Red sunrise brought them to it: a dead lowland of crumbling and rotten soil, starved and poisoned, leprous, blotched with alkali, without grass, without vegetation save for a morbid, fleshy and hateful jelly-growth known as Dead Man's Hand: leafless, flowerless, without even thorn or spine to the gnarled and crippled fingers.

They crossed a dry lake-bed crusted inch-deep with sparkling crystals of salt; they crossed the resonant and resilient bed of a dry soda-lake, spirit-level smooth; they climbed a sudden bench and came out on a fair and wholesome plain checkered with green patches of tall, thrifty salt grass and broad levels of bare ground, white and sunglazed. This was good going; unbidden, the ponies took up their brisk jog-trot; nine brought them to a soapweed country and black gramma. They were on the upgrade now, climbing toward Malibu. They made camp for nooning at the first clump of soapweeds big enough to afford a slender shade for the ponies.

Water from the oak tank under the seat for the eager horses, a thankful roll, corn in the nosebags, then hobbles and a close-cropped swath of black grama; fire and a marvelous breakfast in the shade of the wagon; silence and sleep.

John Sayles woke in mid-afternoon. Pinto and Paint dozed sociably under the soapweed clump. Emil James, curled up on the front seat, smoked a meditative pipe. John Sayles raised a curtain and stared hard at La Fantasia. Then he turned his head and stared at the Malibu.

Emil tapped out his pipe and nodded approval. "Correct!" he said. "Ain't it the truth? Right smart of a universe and very little of us. That is about the proper proportion. This is no place for delusions of grandeur." He reached for his boots. "I'll stir up dinner. You water and feed the horses and harness up. We're due at Red Mesa by dark."

"Why, we're only halfway across," said John Sayles. "At least, so it seems," he added hastily.

"Seems is right," said Emil. "But we're out of the Seem-So country now and up on a real place—with four-fifths of the

way behind us—maybe two-thirds. Them lowlands was the mirage country—the Never-Never country. You want to make the trip by daylight some time. You'll be surprised at the things you see—lakes that aren't there, herds of cattle, the Witch Hills, and a long, low yellow town that the Welshmen claim is one of theirs—all sorts of things. Sometimes there's a grove of palm trees by the lakes, and once I'm pretty near sure I almost saw a drove of camels. Not to mention things that are really there, that you missed last night—Cactus Flats and the greasewood country, and the dust-devils, and the deep sand that we crawled through, one mile and a half an hour, while you were asleep."

"See here, how wide is this flat that isn't flat, anyway?" demanded John Sayles indignantly. "They told me in town it was forty miles."

"It is forty miles—straight across to Malibu Knob, where Keough had his mine explosion the day before you arrived. That's the way the cattle come from the San Quentin country, the Morgans and that bunch—when they don't ship from Magdalena. Our trip is seventy miles. We didn't come straight across. We come slantwise: our road went too far north to water at the stage-station, and then had to tack back. Also, and likewise, the desert has another surprise for you yet—even in the really-truly part of it."

"And all this country, clear to Ridgepole, is the V Cross T Range?"

"Well, no—not all of it. Old Man Gibson runs his own wagon from Pinetop north and west, and out this way as far as the poison sink we crossed this morning. Where we are now is the border of the Fuentes country; they use the grass north from this road to the N 8 range. South of here, the Morgans claim the east side of the Malibu: they have crowded over from the San Quentin Plains, them and the Wyandottes. But all the rest is V Cross T country, with, of course, all us little cowmen scattered round-about. Good outfit; we get along fine together."

"They tell me that the Morgans are not a good outfit, but a very bad outfit," said John Sayles. "They say the Morgans and this man Webb ambushed and killed Clay Mundy a few years back, because they wanted his ranches: and that they mur-

dered another man, at the same time, a stranger who happened to be with Mundy. Seem to be a thorough people, the Morgans. But others told me that the stranger, MacGregor, was a hired killer that the Morgans employed to murder Mundy, and that MacGregor got himself killed in the routine of business."

"Son," said Emil gravely, "the safe plan to use in dealin' with any rumor about old feuds and wars is not to believe all you hear. You needn't disbelieve it: just don't believe it. And one of the wisest ways I know of to put in a pleasant afternoon is not repeating town talk about the Morgans. And this tale is precisely the one they enjoy least. They had a long, hard fight with Mundy, and they held the Mundy empire when he was killed: but they don't run to ambush much, the Morgans."

"I didn't know the Morgans were friends of yours," said the boy.

"Well, you got nothing on the Morgans—neither do they," said Emil, somewhat grimly. He was silent a long time before he spoke again. "So long as I've said this much, I'll say a little more: The Morgans are even less likely to hire murder done than to kill from ambush. No one knows exactly what happened when Clay Mundy died. It was the year of the big rains—either five years ago or four, I don't just remember which. Before the bodies were found, a shower came up and washed out all the sign."

"Sign?" echoed John Sayles. "I don't understand."

"Tracks. With no rain, the tracks would have just about told the story. One thing is sure: There was no question of ambush; it was clear plain. I have seen the place.

"Another thing: The man MacGregor worked for Mundy. He was a pretty tough nut, MacGregor. I've hunted up his record; it is certain that he was never the kind to betray the man who trusted him.

"There were three guns found. Whether MacGregor died fighting Mundy, or fighting at Mundy's side in a pitched battle against the Morgans—I reckon that will never be known. The Morgans have told no story—and nobody has thought to question them.

"Here is how I size it up: There was no ambush; the Mor-

gans fight fair. If there had been a showdown fight, the Morgans would have told their side. Why not? It is my idea that Mundy and MacGregor had a difference of opinion.—Let's go!"

An hour brought them to that far-seen brown slope of yesterday. It took shape now as a slope of mesquite hummocks, and it was not brown at all, but a nameless, indescribable shimmer, an undulating sheen like rye fields in the wind. For the long, drooping, fernlike leaves were two shades of green; the top or outside was a solid color, nearer brown than green, which seemed to soak up the sun and hoard it; the reverse side was an unsubstantial light green which shook off the sun. So slender were those drooping and delicate leaves that the shadow they cast was scarcely more than a veil: the solid, dark mahogany color of trunk and brown branches and brown stems and brown twigs persisted through the gauzy green that quivered and shook and turned and trembled to shimmering change with each slightest breeze, with ever the constant brown bark tinting through.

They wound up and up through the hummocks. Malibu was nearer now, and losing its blueness. Every mile some new feature, shoulder or slope, cliff or cañon cleft, broke through that blue haze, took shape and clearness—and shadows.

The long mesquite slope was topped at last; they came to a wide flat shelf of tableland with a step beyond; mounted that step to another level bench, with yet another far-off step for limit. They climbed that step in turn and came at last to the promised surprise.

"Good Lord!" gasped Sayles. "And I thought these mountains were a straight wall."

A broad and smiling prairie flowed level to the very base of the mountains. Every facet and angle of Malibu shook back the sun. Malibu was suddenly very near: on the closer slopes tufts and puff-balls of dark green leaped up and became cedars. And the Malibu was west no longer, but south; Hueco was west no longer, nor purple, but grim against the northern sky. And where was Red Mesa, that had made a straight line with these two?

While they were busy climbing the last stair, Red Mesa had

fled away into the west. The plain flowed on between Malibu and Hueco in a deep bay: a semicircular Red Mesa made a far-curving shore for it; the prairie beat up in slow waves against the low red cliffs. Malibu and Hueco were capes and headlands to this bay. From cape to cape the red shore made one sheer cliff, rising abruptly from the plain; an unbroken wall, now low, now high, advancing or receding in creeks and bays and inlets, with headland and promontory between, but with no visible passway in all the long dim west.

"There's the N 8 ranch, in the south gable of the Hueco. And here's where we're going to-night—straight ahead," said Emil James, pointing. "You're nearly as close to the N 8 now as you will be at dark."

"Where are we going, then?"

"Barnaby Bright," said Emil.

"What's that—town, ranch, or mine?"

"Something else. It's a pass through Red Mesa. It is *the* pass through Red Mesa."

"I don't see any sign of a pass," said John.

"You don't, and you won't. You can hardly see it when you're right at it. It's just a crack in the rock—a crack with straight-up-and-down walls from fifty to three hundred feet high. A zig-zag crack two miles long and averagin' twenty feet wide—just room enough for two wagons to pass. Curious place! Little crevice goes straight in to the rock, maybe two hundred yards: looks like that's all there is to it. All at once there's an elbow—so sharp a wagon can hardly make the turn —more than a right angle. Then it goes north nearly half a mile, makes another bend, and wanders west for a mile and a half, up to the divide and open country. Splits the rock like you'd split a knot with an axe. But there's no other way across the range for a lifetime each way—not for a wagon. And there's no other way across Red Mesa itself, even for a pack outfit. Red Mesa joins the Hueco and Malibu without crevice or seam—just keeps on going under the mountain. I reckon maybe Red Mesa is the end of the crowbar that pried the mountains up."

"What is it—all one solid cliff?"

"One solid cliff all the way except for the crack at Barnaby Bright. It's forty miles straight across from Malibu to Hueco

and the Mesa makes maybe fifteen miles' dip to the west and back again. Some fence!"

"What kind of people live at this Barnaby place?"

"Nobody lives there. Just a little creek that runs out of the rock. Nobody lives closer than Fuentes, ten miles north—or twenty-five miles south, at the new Morgan Ranch in the north end of Malibu. Creek belongs to the Fuentes clan any time this last two hundred years and more, but they live in their own town. You can't see Fuentes from here; it's in a sheltered valley, behind one of them little capes."

"Do we go there to-night?"

"Nope. We water at the creek and slip out a little ways to grass. Cattle have got it pretty well eaten off next to the water. We can loiter along to Fuentes in the morning."

"I'd like to see that crack in the rock. It must be a strange place."

"Well, you can. It was made on purpose to look at, I reckon —and to use. We'll go see *mañana*—rise with the lark or birds to that effect. We can walk back while the ponies take a little extra rest—or we can fork the ponies, bareback, and give 'em another drink. No hurry. It's worth seeing, Barnaby Bright is."

"So this was that surprise of yours—this big bend in the mountains?" said John Sayles. "Well, it surprises me, all right. These mountains are not dependable."

"They are not," said Emil. "But I like it better where the mountains run every which-a-way, like this. And I like the mirage country, too. When you're not sure whether you really see something or just think you see it, you're apt to be pretty tolerant about things you haven't seen—things somebody said they was told somebody saw once. That saves trouble. Nobody gets excited over things they really know. It is the things that nobody knows anything about that people fight over. That's the beauty of the Seem-So country. When even the mountains don't stay put, it's hard to be bigot-y. You get it firm in your old thick head that you might be maybe mistaken about most anything."

"But those mountains by Albuquerque, the Sandias and Manzanos—surely they were straight?"

"Yes," said Emil. "East of the river, the hills run pretty

regular in their habits. I used to live over there once—farther south, in the big valley between the Front Range and the San Andres.

"Well, it was amusing. The general trend of the Front Range—the Guadelupe-Sacramento-White Mountain-Capitan system—was from the southeast to the northwest, or thereabouts. On the west side the Organ-San Andres-Oscura combination—that's the same range as your Sandias at Albuquerque, only with different names—why, they edged just the other way a little. So a man from the east side held mighty steadfast to the theory that northwest was north, or, at the most liberal view, that north-northwest was north. They squared their convictions with the biggest solid fact at hand; and you see, them mountains was plenty incontrovertible.

"Just as reasonably, the west side man emotionally observed northeast as north, or north-northeast if he was broadminded: the San Andres was also what you might call permanent and tangible.

"Well, when these people met each other in the middle of the plain, they was all at right angles and cross-purposes. It was right comical. Oh, they liked each other well enough, and got along, somehow. But they couldn't have any real respect for any one holdin' such barbarous creeds.

"The east side was purposely and conscientiously and resolutely right, and knew it durned well: how could a stubborn west side, which was purposely and willfully and knowingly wrong about so simple and easy a matter as north and south, have any worth-while opinions on other subjects, eh? This amused me all the more," said Emil, "because, where I lived, the mountains run due north and south."

Bands of cattle grew more frequent. The red shore wavered nearer and nearer; in the cliff the black line that was their goal became a deep black gash. In the long shade of that great red wall, as sunset flamed and faded, they toiled up a sloping triangle of parked cedar to a delta of willow and ash, where a trickle of water tinkled over rocky ledges of a little gravelly wash. A hundred yards away, the deep notch of the pass showed brokenly and dim between the tree-trunks.

John Sayles unhitched Paint and Pinto, and led them up-

stream to a pool. Emil was pouring fresh water into the oaken tank, when John Sayles gave a startled exclamation.

"What's that?"

John Sayles was beyond the trees: he pointed at the near and narrow pass.

"What's what?" answered Emil placidly.

"I didn't believe it at first—I thought it was my eyes, or some trick of shadows and twilight. But it's a house!" cried John Sayles. "It's a house built all the way across the pass—built into the cliff walls! And the wagon road runs square through the house!"

"That is no house," said Emil. "It's a church—the Church of Barnaby Bright."

CHAPTER IV

BARNABY BRIGHT

Of the visitors to this planet three centuries ago were two men who were half a lifetime apart and half a world: a Catalán and a Spaniard of Peru. They met once only, in Santa Fé of New Mexico, City Royal of the Holy Faith of Saint Francis; and that hour changed the tale of history.

The world was Spain's when blue-eyed Baltazar Fuentes was born in an old gray town, close nipped between the Pyrenees and the tideless midland sea: Cadaquez, in Catalonia. The Second Philip was yet king.

At fifteen years, the manling Fuentes went down to the lowlands, seeking fortune. Barcelona knew him for a space, and Tortosa. There were sea-ventures befitting a Catalán. Then he turned inland, followed the Elbo to Zaragoza, found fortune there and friends, and good repute, won him a fair young wife from the strong family of Caldas. So peace and love and home and pleasant years were Baltazar's; one strong son at last to crown his joy. The Third Philip died, and the Fourth took the crown: Olivarez the favorite ruled Spain, and Spain the world.

The world was breaking free when Baltazar Fuentes fled from walled Zaragoza with a king's wrath at his back. His wife rode by his side, loyal and brave; he carried before him in the saddle Timoteo, their son. Behind him in the cool, sweet dawn, something huddled and lay still in a pleasant glade by Zaragoza wall: something which of late had been a man, alive and breathing, arrogant and daring: the young Marquis of Calahorra, "fortunate Calahorra," darling of the court, right hand of the king's favorite. There had been a sneering word, glancing at Baltazar's young wife; swords; this.

The blood hate of Olivarez clung close upon their track. They fled westward, through Soria, Segovia, Valladolid, haunted Zamora, Orense; took ship at Vigo; to see gray Cadaquez no more, or green valley of the Elbo.

Their sail was yet white in the sea-road when a weary troop drew rain upon the whispering shore, and a cadet of Calahorra, his horse-hoofs in the foam and the flung spume salt upon his cheek, stared down the sun-lane to the west and shook his fist at the unconquered sea. And the sad mists rose, and night, and blotted out that sail.

Spain knew those fugitives no more. The new world swallowed them up. Olivarez fell in 1643. On a later year, when news of that fall came slowly to him, Fuentes came from the silent places of his hiding and took house in the city of Mexico. That brave wife was dead; Baltazar was a silent man, grave and thoughtful; turned fifty now. The boy Timoteo became man in the city, married there, died there; leaving two young sons.

Baltzar Fuentes became a Franciscan, "Of the Strict Observance." When he was sent out to the northern marches to serve his order, he had talk with the mate of his dead son and took with him into the north his youngest grandson, another Timeteo; the year 1556 brought him to Santa Fé: De Mendizaval was Governor and Captain-General of New Mexico.

The man I am to speak of now was born to splendor, apprenticed to greatness. Lima was his birthplace, 1624 the year.

Don Diego Dionisio de Peñalosa was descended from the famous houses of Peñalosa and Briceña, Ocampo, Verdugo and Cordova: by the mother's side, from Dávila, Arias de Anaya, Valdivia, Cabrera, and Boabdilla. He was close and doubly kin to the Dukes of Sessa and Escalona, the Counts of Pierto en Rostro and to the Marquises of Maya: his wife was grand-daughter to Fernan Cortéz, "the ever victorious."

We smile at this Hidalgo, "Son of Someone." But if we knew any man from our own stock clear in descent at once from Percy and Neville, Douglas and Graeme, Clifford and Talbot, Sidney, Raleigh and Drake, Howard and Gordon and

Glendower, Clive, Hastings, Charnock and Wolfe—we would not smile.

Don Diego became early a man of mark. Family gave him opportunity; he used it greatly. For the man himself, he was in no way lacking: no unworthy "great-grandson of the three greatest knights": a swift, alert man, fiery-daring, hardy, resolute, adroit, indomitable—and fortunate. He had need for the last two qualities: his ventures ranged through five thousand miles of hardship, toil and danger: brilliant and skillful soldier, wise and shifty administrator. One great and rarest virtue was his, a kindly tolerant, sympathetic patience with inferiors and with the copper children of the new world: one rank vice, an overgrown pride in his dealings with those of his own kidney: arrogant and stiffnecked pride, fiery, violent and overbearing.

A youth of war, pathmaking, building: this was a man in love with joy, and one who loved better to build than to war, and the long road more than either: 'Lord of the cities of Gaurina and Farara, and of its eleven towns: Fendatory Commendatory Knight of the City of La Paz, and Perpetual Regidor therein, and in the Five Provinces of its District:— . . . making his house more illustrious by his sword with titles of Marquis and Count of fair cities which he has founded from the cornerstones.' His list of titles may yet be found, poor Peñalosa, Brisceña y Verdugo, Ocampo y Valdivia: a double triangle worthy of an emperor; 'Count of Valdivia in Chile, Viscount of La Ymperial, Marquis of Arauco and of Oristán, Governor and Captain-General of New Mexico, Adelantado (First-Man, Foregoer) of Chile and of the Gran Quivira in the west of this New World of America' —Dust that was Diego, how deep you drank of life!

A marked man: it was whispered, echoed in new world corridors that here was one fitted to carry on the great traditions of the Conquistadóres. But, "in the midnight and flourish of his May," our Diego took one wrong turning, became tacit partisan of St. Francis against St. Dominic; and met his first set-back when he quarreled with the brother of the Count of Salvetierra, Viceroy of Peru: quarrel patched-up to peace by authority: smoldering.

Because of this quarrel and his desire of seeing Spain, Peña-

losa embarked at Calloa in 1652. The ship foundered within sight of Payta Port: Don Diego lost forty thousand crowns thereby, saving some twelve thousand in pearls and precious stones. He proceeded to Panama: promptly found an uncle, Don Alonzo Briseña, Bishop of Nicaragua: visited him. From here, after another shipwreck, he went to Mexico, capital of New Spain, where he awaited news and money from Peru.

Albuquerque was Viceroy of New Spain: dusky-brilliant Peñalosa pleased him well: found employment. He led reinforcements to Montalegre, holding Vera Cruz against Cromwell's fleet of sixty-eight men-of-war. The fleet captured Jamaica for England; Peñalosa bore himself well in that losing fight: was sent posthaste to perilled Havana with his seasoned infantry: married there the grand-daughter of Cortéz. On his return, high in favor, he became governor of Xiqilpa, of Chilcota, Lieutenant-General in those provinces.

The Duke of Albuquerque passed, the Marquis-Count of Baños succeeded.—'Great complaints were made to him against Don Bernard Lopez de Mendizaval, Governor of New Mexico, whose greatest fault was his falling out with the inquisitors and their partisans. Nevertheless, he was recalled and the Count of Peñaloso was selected to command in his stead and to appease the troubles ordinary to that country.'—This was the hour of his desire: New Mexico was on the very marches and bounds of empire: he would follow the path of Cabeça de Vaca, Coronado, Espejo, Juan de Oñate: outgo them. He received his commission as Governor and Captain-General at the close of the year 1660, and set forth at once. Yet he made no speed of that journey; lingered in Zacetecas for two months, another month in Parral. Our Diego was Dionysius too: there is an offshoot house of "Peñalossa" in Zacetecas to this day, claiming descent from him.

Now all things prospered to Peñalosa's hand. 'He defeated the hostile Indians called Apachs and compelled them to sue for peace. He founded two new cities, erected several public buildings and discovered new countries.' He proved and armed his *dorados*,—Golden Ones—'a very brilliant company of eighty Spaniards, among whom were some foreigners married in these parts,' and he established the first American press-agent, 'Father Friar Nicolas de Freytas, of the Order of St.

Francis, Preacher, Commissary Visitor of the Third Order, and Guardian of the Convent of San Yldephonso in this kingdom, and Chaplain to His Most Illustrious Lordship.'

Freytas it was who wrote the 'vague, bombastic and curious' account of the discovery by Peñalosa, in 1662, of the 'City and country of Quivira.' 'So glorious an enterprise, giving treasures to the crown of Spain to dominate the globe, for the Glory of God, in whose mighty hand are all things past, present, and to come, and of His Blessed Mother, the Virgin Mary, Our Lady, conceived without stain of original sin.'

Those statistics are mixed. If you read that sentence carefully, you will get some hint of the confused whirling mind of Nicolas de Freytas—who was author also of a "Memorial of the Señor Adelantado", designed for the eye of Spanish Majesty: and of a sufficiently naive "Account" of a previous expedition of Saldivar in 1618 to the far lands "fifteen days beyond the last of Moq" (Moqui) to the River of Good Hope, or del Tison—(Gila): wherein, on their turning back, one Father Friar Lazaras cried out "in a loud voice with wonderful grief", an eloquent eulogy of our Don Diego Dionisio de Peñalosa, and a judicious recital of his merits: although, at that time, our Diego would not be born for six years to come. This prenatal circumstance lends a saffron touch to the "Account", deepened by a broad hint near the end that the unborn Peñalosa "aspires to that (title) of Duke to become as illustrious of himself as the most excellent of his glorious progenitors, to whose titles of Marquis, Count and Viscount he is lawful heir, as of their zeal in honoring and patronizing our Seraphic order, as so Christian a knight and our Brother by Letters Patent".

The story trusts that the passage is sufficiently clear. Or the final paragraph of the "Note" to the "Account".

"May our Lord in His infinite mercy grant that our Governor and Captain-General may by his valor and skill remove all the difficulties raised by those who are not accustomed to overcome the impossible, as his Lordship is, for whom Divine Providence has reserved it in its secret bosom from all time."

The Freytas record of the journey "through the country of the Escanxaques to the large river which they call Mischipi' " is fearfully and wonderfully made. Nevertheless, it seems

probable that Peñalosa reached the Missouri near where Omaha now stands: certain that he marched from Santa Fé three months northeast into the buffalo country. The description of rivers, soil, vegetation, fish, animals, are circumstantial and tally exactly to the last detail with our own knowledge, bird and flower, shrub and tree: even to the Indian's proverb "To ten Hiroquees four of the Tuft, and to these two of the Escanxaques, and to ten Escanxaques one Apache." Also the sons of Peñalosa's *dorados* live in New Mexico today, Duran and Chavez, Lucero and Godoy: their twilight tales keep him Foregoer yet, hold him last of the Conquistadores.

Shifty-fortunate Peñalosa brought his *dorados* safely back to Santa Fé, not one lost on that long expedition, to "Quivira" —Quebira, Great Land: he dreamed of map-making and Dukeships. There was also a sweet woman-child, born in Santa Fé at about this time, born to his love but not to his name, of whom he had much pride and joy.—The grand-daughter of Cortéz had died young, and before Zacetecas.

Then, upon a day, planning new exploits, dreaming great things, Peñalosa looked forth from his window in the Adobe Palace and saw in the courtyard a gray friar, unknown to him: who shook a chiding finger at a young Indian boy, and, as Diego gathered, admonished him for some boyish failing. The boy was Popé, a lad of the Teguas: the friar was Father Baltazar Fuentes.

On the heels of this there was a prodigious tumult in the guard room: black-gowned Huelva stormed in upon Don Diego; dark Huelva, Commisary-General of the Inquisition; herding before him gray friar and Indian boy of the courtyard, and Father Michael Guevera, Guardian of the Convent of Santa Fé. Huelva was flaming, Guevera cowed; the lad stolid; the stranger friar unfluttered, eyes downcast, quiet. Huelva's words came in a torrent.

"Things go from bad to worse here, there is no discipline, no order: the spread of our holy religion is neglected, while we give ourselves to idleness and music, picture-making, joyance, and all disorder. Here is heathen idolatry flourishing in your capital, tolerated. Punishment for the offenders! I demand instant justice!"

Peñalosa dandled his child. "Disorder is indeed rife, Holy

Father", he said. "That is best proven by yourself. I think Your Paternity takes a strange way of seeking order, when you so far forget your station and mine that you break unannounced and blustering upon your Governor, more like a tipsy soldier reeling to barracks than one headman seeking counsel with another for the good of the state. If you have cause of complaint against these three, set it forth in clear words. I will see justice done."

Huelva quivered. He sought to control himself. Three words or four he spoke calmly: then hate seized him, he shook with that passion. "Lashes for this red child of hell!—Lashes once and again for this faithless Priest! Penance"—he whirled on Guevera—"penance and discipline for the slothful shepherd!"

"Now, that may very well be," said Peñalosa, arching his silken brows. "But I must remind Your Paternity that it is the custom of all lands to know and name the crime before sentence is meted; and, in this new world at least, we sometimes require proof to the accusation. Again, if I may point it out, it is the part of the accuser to bear witness: it is for the judge to weigh, to give sentence or withhold it. And it is my thought," said Peñalosa, evenly, "that Your Commissary-ship has forgotten—again—who is judge and Governor in Santa Fé."

"Do you bait me, then?" gritted Huelva.

"Not in the least, Reverend Father. I but mention, with admiration, that humility to which you are sworn. I point out the seemly bearing which befits a witness, seeking—justice, I believe you said? No more than that. I await your leisure. You have charges to prefer?"

"Heresy! blasphemy! idolatry! This Popé of Tegua," cried Huelva, pointing, "serves the devil his father! He was seen and heard at sunrise of this morning, practising the hellish rites of sun-worship: this Franciscan Fuentes, unprofitable servant of God, lukewarm, rebuked him with pleasant words, almost smiling—I saw and heard!—while this Franciscan Guevera, Head of his Order here, looked on, consenting, complacent."

Peñalosa considered. He spoke to the unknown friar:

"I have not seen you before, I think?"

Fuentes raised his eyes. "No, Señor Governor. I have been afield since your coming: first in the villages of the Pecos, lately in Acoma and Sia. I am Father Fuentes.

"Baltazar Fuentes? Yes? I have heard another tale of you than this—an old tale. But is this one true?"

"It is, Señor Governor. I found the lad in sun-worship, even as Father Huelva has stated. The boy did as his fathers taught him: made no concealment, thought no wrong. I instructed him to worship, not the sun, but the Maker of suns."

"You hear?" cried Huelva in great voice. "They confess! The lash for this smooth-spoken priest: the lash for the heretic redskin, death if he bow himself before hell again."

"I have no great relish for these lashes of yours, Father," quoth Peñalosa. "I hold that Father Fuentes erred greatly in that he did not stress the enormity of the offense: that is his business. I recommend him to the discipline of his Order. And I think", said Peñalosa smoothly, "that this is a fitting time to point out to Your Paternity a circumstance which seems to have escaped your notice: that the servants of Saint Francis make no demand on those of Saint Dominic, (already overburdened), when they have need to correct a sinful brother."

Huelva glowered: was mute.

"For the boy, I would remind you that we are few: a handful of Spaniards, cast down in a wilderness of savage nations, cut off from any succor by a great journey and waste places. If it were policy alone, it sorts well with our wisdom to be plainly just in the eyes of these barbarous savages: even to smooth justice with mercy. It is a rule that has served me well.

"You are yourself lax in the faith, long suspected," growled Huelva, taken back at this unexpected turn.

"I will make an end of suspicion then," said Don Diego, eyes a-dance. "If I have been lax aforetime, I will be lax still. The boy shall be warned and instructed in our true and holy faith: no hurt shall fall to him. Why, 'tis but a child! Bethink you, Father, our Lord Christ loved children." Peñalosa looked down at that brown-winsome small daughter of his; summoning the nurse, he gave the child to her keeping; dismissed the boy Popé, with grave monition: turned his mocking eye on dark Huelva.

"Worshipped the sun, did he, the rascal? Well, I do not blame him greatly. Holy Father, that sun, more like your hell than any place I know, is yet visible Source and Giver of Life: small wonder if the savages bow down to it."

Fanatic rage surged to Huelva's brow. "Blasphemer!" he thundered. "You shall burn for this!" Guevera trembled. Baltazar eyed his new Governor with interest.

"It may be as you say," said Diego carelessly. "But in the meantime I am lord of this province, answerable for safety and upkeep: my will is peace and not war. To the better keeping of that peace I think it altogether needful to check your meddling tyranny and usurpations. We are at the world's edge here; I could name one who stands in more peril than Peñalosa."

"I will break you for this insolence—*criollo!*"

Diego sat still under the insult: laughed aloud. "Breaking after burning, Father? Come, you grow reasonable; my poor ashes could bear that. It pleases me to see your arrogance dwindle; you move in the right direction; I mean to teach you more reason still. Man, I know your inches, your letters and plots! You harried de Mendizaval, you were millstone to his neck. You would dispose sovereignly of all things, make your lord and governor your puppet. You have meddled with affairs of mine from the first; conspired against me: tampered with my *dorados,* who told me straightway. Meddler and marplot, they laugh at you; would cast you into prison at my word."

Huelva thrust out his chin. "Not one would dare lay hand on the minister of our Most Holy Office! I defy you—creole!

"Now, that may be true," said Peñalosa, softly, "though I think you do some injustice to their daring. Yet the anger of the Holy Inquisition is a thing to be feared; you may be right after all. I shall not put them to the test. The rather, because I know one whose daring has never failed me: a *criollo!*" He flashed upon Huelva, hand on throat, dagger to heart. "I arrest you as danger to the state!"

"Baseborn——!" gurgled Huelva. Diego's hand gripped his windpipe, the keen steel drew back. Guevera started forward in horror: Fuentes laid a large hand to Guevera's breast. Diego's hand loosed its clutch a little.

"You were saying—?" said Diego, waiting.

Huelva saw death glitter at his eyes. "An angry word," he muttered.

"Which you regret, doubtless?"

Guevera's knees shook with terror. Huelva's desperate eye rolled to him, to calm-eyed Fuentes.

"Which you regret?"

"Which I regret," mumbled Huelva.

"And you yield yourself prisoner?"

"Yes."

Peñalosa plucked off his hand: the Inquisitor drew sweet air into his lungs with a deep breath, sweetest of his life. "Come, we grow acquainted," said Peñalosa. "You shall lie under lock and key in the next room till you make submission; with fair bread and water to purge your pride."

"And yet", said stubborn Huelva, "you have not called your guard."

"You speak a wise word there," laughed Peñalosa. "You are shrewd and stubborn, you shall be of use to me yet. This is a perilous matter: my golden ones shall not lay finger to it, nor know it. I will hold you prisoner in my own room; we will converse together; you shall meditate. You shall be help to me yet, not hindrance. To that end, I will have you turn your thoughts more to the spread of our Holy Gospel, and to defence, garrison, treaties, agriculture, commerce: with less talk of lashings, burnings and breakings. Take my arm, reverend sir: you shall seem to go as an honored guest, in friendly talk, lest rumor—perhaps laughter—glance upon your authority."

"Which friendly talk and seeming of guest," returned Huelva steadily, "safeguards your own authority as well as mine."

"You shall have the last word, too," said Peñalosa gaily. "You do not lack for brains, I find. These two will hold tongue between teeth, both for our sakes and their own. Will you not visit your room, reverend Father?"

Peñalosa came back at once. He pulled a long face and looked a-slant on Fuentes, ignoring Guevera: Guevera says it, he tells the tale. Yet Guevera was of the grandeés, Fuentes peasant-born: Peñalosa knew to judge a man.

"Here is a goodly coil!" says Diego.

"My fault, and I ask pardon for it," says Fuentes. "I was too mild with the boy, too stiff with the Dominican."

"No fault of yours," says Don Diego. "This affair was to be settled. It has been drawing to a head this year. The colony is in no posture to thrive under two masters. As for mildness and easy dealing with the heathen, that is root and branch of my policy, I stand or fall by that: I will not have the colony thrust into needless hazard: this clash was bound to come, to-morrow or to-day. Yet it is my poor thought that two of us three are greatly jeopardized. Saint Dominic carries all: if I cannot tame and master yonder hooded-crow, the Holy Office will make but one mouthful of the two of us." He considered for a brief silence. "I think we two have made history this day," said Peñalosa laughing lightly. "I think we are the first, in the New World at least, to raise finger against the Holy Office. It might be a wise choice, Father Fuentes, if you elect to ply your labors at our further outposts. Peñalosa might weather the storm, if storm there comes. Time will show." So says Guevera.

Huelva made submission, being prisoner seven days. It is certain that Don Diego put himself out to ingratiate himself, to captivate his captive; it is like that Huelva fell under his charm, in spite of fear, humiliation, fanatic hate. From that time, Diego heaped his late foe with high employment and honors. Governor and Commissary-General worked hand-in-glove: and all things went well with the colony. That was the golden age of New Mexico.

In 1664, Peñalosa returned to Mexico. Three months and a half he loitered in Parral, "in order to propose to the Viceroy the conquest of those countries which he had discovered." —That loitering was his bane. In Mexico City, the Holy Office, "which never pardons anything done against its supreme authority," had him arrested: pounced upon him as he dismounted at the Viceroy's door.

In the north, wavering Guevera, himself a Catalán, gave Fuentes warning of the coming storm. Baltazan Fuentes took up his grandson Timoteo and fled away into the wilderness: wandered from tribe to tribe, befriended. He passed southward in a long valley between unknown mountains, met and companied a wandering family of the Moqui; turned east-

ward across a high mountain to the haunted valley of the Witch Hills, where the Moqui rode swiftly, with incantations: found thereby a fair high table-land walled by a long, red cliff, in which was a cleft pass a bare lance-length in width, with a creek of sweet water therein: for a day's journey on either side there was no other passway.

Then Father Fuentes lifted up his eyes, and saw that the wilderness was very great and he was very small, weak and stricken with years. He tarried at that red pass and there laid a trap for souls. Since the redskins were scattered far, since he could no longer seek them in his age, they should come to him in this gateway: seeking those pools of sweet water, they should find the water of life.

The Moqui aided him in his desire. In the narrow mouth of that red pass he built a roof of hewn cedar into the living rock, where it overhung and closed together: a floor of cedar logs, high above the floodway; rude wall and door, a high stairway to that door, a gate at the water-way: and there, on the eleventh of June, the day of Saint Barnabas the Apostle, he founded a church and named it for Saint Barnabas.

A far word had gone forth of Fuentes; the Sign of the Left Breast, "Goodheart," Father, was his to all the wandering tribes. His house of God became a Place of Truce, and there he preached to them a God mighty and merciful.

In the year 1680, driven by exaction and outrage, the tribes of New Mexico arose and exterminated the Spaniards, root and branch. A young chief of the Teguas was leader; his name, Popé. It was a well-planned rising: the blow was struck in all places at the same hour, sudden and swift. A scanty few—civilians, soldiers, priests, women and children—outlived the first butcher-work, and fled south with Governor Otermin. Where the mission of Socorro, Nuestra Señora de Socorro, was afterwards built for thankfulness, they were joined by other fugitives, a strong party from the Pecos; made a stand, made good their retreat to where El Paso now stands.

Of those left behind but two were spared by the savages; Timoteo, the grandson of dead Fuentes; and Elena, daughter of Peñalosa. These two were wedded on a later year: housed themselves at a great spring under that red cliff, not far from the church Fuentes builded. For one fourth of a thousand

years their descendants have dwelt under those forgotten skies: christened, wedded, buried by the church of Saint Barnabas.

The Inquisition kept Peñalosa in prison for thirty-two months, "made inquiry into all his actions and all his words." It stripped him of his offices and declared him incapable of holding any office in New Spain. It sold his property (to itself) for eighty-six thousand crowns—worth three hundred thousand, says Peñalosa: fined him fifty-one thousand of these crowns, and kept the other thirty-five thousand.

Here is an account by an eye witness, of a "special" Auto de Fé celebrated at the convent of Santo Domingo on the third of February 1668. It is from the diary of Antonio de Robles, a Pepys of Mexico.

"There also came forth in the said Auto de Fé, Diego de Peñalosa, governor of New Mexico, for unrestrained language (*suelto da lengua,* leaps of the tongue) against priests and lords inquisitors, and some absurdities which bordered on blasphemy. He came out in a shirt, which was very fine; dress of black velvet; his hair (which was his own and long) well dressed; his stockings wrinkled; very large hand-ruffles of Flemish point-lace, then used, so that apparently he attired himself on purpose, without cloak or hat, with a green candle in his hand. He excited much compassion."

You may judge how Peñalosa was little like to stomach all this. You are to consider that the man had seen greatness at his finger-tips. The truth is, he liked it not at all: vowed revenge.

Discredited, penniless, friendless, without employment: poor antagonist for the all-powerful Inquisition! Where to begin? Letters to Peru were unanswered: Bishop-uncle was coy. Friends, of the Grandeé sort, ignored him, and all men feared the wrath of the Holy Office: this man, guilty of the first agent, was also victim of the first blacklist.

Haughty-stubborn Peñalosa took sneer and slight of silken Grandeés in very ill part. There were forbidden duels; tough Peñalosa victor; punishment not pushed home. We may hope that this unlooked-for clemency was in some part due to grudging admiration for the man, respect for unmerited misfortune: it is certain that once his vanquished antagonist

pleaded for him. And authority shrank from any irrevocable affront to the powerful families of our Diego's kinsmen, who had drawn together to a sinister and sullen faction, during the months of his imprisonment. Even the all-powerful Inquisition had not quite dared Diego's death. In fact, they were lenient with him—as Inquisitors go. At that same very special Auto which condemned Diego, a lesser offender and of a less formidable family, one Ferdinand de Tolosa, received four hundred lashes on the installment plan, and was banished to the Phillipine Islands. As reverse and offset to this, sullen Valdivias, Ocampos, Mayas, feared to offend the Inquisition; his life safe, they reached no aid to their black-sheep kinsman.

It would be shameful to tell you to what shifts Diego was driven to keep bare life: Bishop-uncle remaining shy. It was the bounty of an old foot-soldier of his that paid for passage to Havana, in 1669. Havana, once saved by him, received him but coldly: the terror of the Inquisition stalked abroad. Yet he contrived to live: lingered there for many months, awaited letters from Peru: none coming.

He took sail at last in a Canary Island vessel which took him to the Island of Teneriffe. The governor was Diego's cousin, and a bigot. He received his broken kinsman kindly enough, but would further no voyage to Spain. Bearded sea-captains, at Peñalosa's askings, looked a-slant at him, whispered, shook their heads.

Peñalosa was resolved for Spain and justice. It was a time of truce: he took ship under an English heretic: landed in London. He gained favor with the English king and the Duke of York, who were keen to hear of that great river of his, the Mischipi or Paliçada, and the rich country of Quivira. But the Marquis de Fresno and the Count de Molina, Spanish Ambassadors, threw discredit upon him, gave him cold looks; told King James that this was a contumacious rebel, a man not allowed to set foot in Spain: Spanish justice! Diego saw at last how useless it was to seek redress of Spain.

Each rebuff and insult made deeper his haughty-stubborn hate, firmer his purpose; at each fresh wrong, Peñalosa tightened his belt and set his grim face to his task. He held that "leaping" tongue of his in leash now, pondered deeply

on new-world maps, probed Spain for the weak joint in her armor. He was American-born; to his death-day he never put foot to Spanish soil. The ambassadors persecuted him afresh, intrigued against him, sought his life at the hands of secret bravos—luckless!—heaped infamy upon him, quite cast down his credit at the court; drove him out at last.

He proceeded to France, threw himself "upon the protection of the greatest king in the world." Spanish ambassadors, Marquis de Los Balazes and others, looked upon him coldly, expressed "distrust of his stay in France."

By this time, Peñalosa's purpose was shaped and hardened. Taking a hint from the English king, who had shown so much interest in that river of Mischipi, he set himself to turn France to that great river, to throw France against Spain in the New World. He made it his life-work—and he succeeded.

By now he knew himself to be a marked man; knew that he was to mix no more at first hand with the affairs of the great. He accepted that fact, humbled himself, drew into the background. He sought for his middleman: found him in the young Sieur de La Salle, an adventurer whose imagination was fired by a storied river he was to follow from the Great Lakes for an eight months' journey to the Gulf of California—Road to China!

Peñalosa threw himself into La Salle's party, pushed La Salle's fortunes with all his genius. More especially he bent his intrigues to tempt the cupidity and ambition of the Grand Monarch with the richness of the *Gran Quivira.*

From this time, Peñalosa becomes a thin and shadowy figure. There is a glimpse of him at the house of one M. Morel, where he dined in company with La Salle and Beaujeu. He knew shallows and miseries. Rumor makes him fencing master—a good one—under the assumed name of Pinito Pino.—And, year after year, trackless rumors of Quivira swell cumulative, beat on the ear of King and court and France, turn all eyes that way; La Salle is listened to, applauded, encouraged; gets his chance: France is committed to the "Mischipi".

Peñalosa, or a thin ghost of him, haunts the antechambers of the Tuilleries: patient now, this son of the Conquistadores; that leaping tongue of his schooled to silence. There is a

"Memorial" of his, "On the Affairs of America" given to Monsieur de Seignelai, Minister of the Marine: it sets forth the facility with which New Biscay may be conquered, a colony established: "an enterprise more ruinous to the Spanish monarchy than in any other place where his majesty can attack." There are alternative plans, with details. French "Fribustiers" from Santo Domingo are to make the attack, under their own chief, Grammont; Peñalosa is to be guide.

"He believes that he cannot give better pledges of his fidelity than by putting himself, without a single other countryman of his own, among a thousand or twelve hundred warlike Frenchmen, and at the discretion of the French commander, who is to lead them with him, and to whom he says orders may be given to hang him on the first tree, if he fails in any promise he makes."

Other "Memoirs," too many: one, "touching the establishment of a new colony at the mouth of the river called Rio Bravo."—a project carried out somewhat later, by Philip Nolan and others.

At last—victory! French Government consents; La Salle's foray to New Biscay, Peñalosa's to Panuco, are mutually to support each other: La Salle's to go first. It is 1684: Peñalosa is sixty years old: La Salle sails from La Rochelle in July. Alas! A luckless expedition, and bungled; the Spaniards were alert, energetic; La Salle unfit: French Government loses heart, abandons both La Salle in Texas and Peñalosa in France. Beaujeu and the Abbé Cavalier records how eagerly they awaited the reinforcements under Peñalosa till the end of 1686. Peñalosa died in Paris on almost the same day that La Salle perished in Texas.

On this tormented planet perhaps there has been no man, missing greatness, who came so near that frantic blame and praise which men call Fame, and prize so strangely, as this baffled Peñalosa. He set a bound to the empire of Spain, that dim adventurer; his dream became Louisiana; his hand was first in America to strike a blow for freedom, first to dare the Inquisition: be that his epitaph. Bancroft terms him imposter, perhaps because the Inquisition indicted him as *"embustero."* I prefer the testimony of Popé the Tegua, who knew the man and spared his love-child.—It is so long ago!—the word cannot harm her now.

CHAPTER V

FUENTES

"I'm glad we didn't go on last night. Wouldn't have missed this for a farm," declared John Sayles, looking up between the narrow walls to a rift of blue sky.

"Thought you'd enjoy it," said Emil. "Folks do. No use going further, though. We've seen the best. Cliffs get lower from here on."

They turned back down the Z-shaped pass, John Sayles riding sidewise and debonair. They rode under the cedar floor of the little church: John Sayles checked the Paint horse and looked back.

"Sixteen-sixty-four! Why that was the year the English took over New York, wasn't it?"

"Search me!" said Emil. "It's been a right smart spell, anyhow. The contractor put just such wood into Solomon's temple, but the old Fuentes person put it all over Solomon in the matter of walls. Of course, there's been repairing done as needed. The Fuentes *gente* saw to that. Doors have never been locked, and that mess of silver candlesticks and truck is the original outfit. Don't say anything about it when you get back to New York, will you?"

"But why didn't the Fuentes crowd settle here?"

"They did—the first pair— for a year or two. Then they moved. For one thing, the new homestead is level and easy to irrigate. You maybe notice that this is steepish country, right here. Better soil there, too, and more water. I reckon Fuentes spring is a natural artesian well, and that some meddlesome guy will bore and find heap water thereabouts, some day. But I judge the main reason for moving was that the Indians accepted this place as holy ground. Neutral ground anyhow: there hasn't been a man killed at this water, red or

white, since the day grandpa Fuentes stopped his rambling about and settled down here. The Indians set a heap of store by grandpa, it seems. I reckon maybe his folks figured that this was God's Ground and felt backward about jumping the claim on Him.—Let's go!"

Their camp was under the cliff, half a mile north from church and water. When they had hitched up and were ready to start, Emil paused and looked around him.

"I declare, this is a right pleasant place here," he said. "Guess I'll locate this camp as a homestead for myself, if you'll be a witness."

"Homestead?" echoed John Sales. "You're never going to bring your cattle out here, that much further from a market?"

"Oh, no. Cattle would go right back, and they're in a good place now," said Emil tranquilly. "Besides, this is Fuentes country. They wouldn't like it for me to crowd in with cattle." From one of the side curtains he produced paper and pencil.

"But what do you want of a homestead, then?"

"Live here. Good neighborhood." Emil nodded his head toward the church of Barnaby Bright and began writing.

"But there's no water."

"Haul it up. Or dig."

"Humph—dig! How far would you have to dig, do you think?"

"Don't think—I know," said Emil writing industriously. "Six hundred feet."

"Really? What's the joke? You don't mean to tell me you can see that far down, I hope?"

"Not down," said Emil, patiently. "In—in and a little up." He jerked his pencil over his shoulder at the overhanging cliff. "It's just about six hundred feet straight in from here to the second elbow of Barnaby Bright Pass, where we turned back awhile ago, as I figure it. Creek full of water there. You sign here and we'll go. Ought to have two witnesses, I reckon. I'll get somebody else to stop as he is passing by, and put his name to it."

John Sayles signed: Emil built a little monument of stone, took an empty baking powder tin from the chuck-box, slipped his location notice in this, and placed the tin in the manument.

"Tell me some more about the Fuentes clan," said John Sayles when they were on the road again. "I listened to all the cowboys talk in San Clemente, and asked all the questions I knew, but none of them over mentioned the name of Fuentes."

"That's easy. The Fuentes cattle have all been raised right here, and the mammies of 'em, and their mammies. They are at home, those cattle.—They don't want to go anywhere else, and they wouldn't stay anywhere else. The Fuentes people don't have to attend the roundups, and so they don't figure much in camp-fire talk. Also, there isn't just one big brand, but fifteen or thirty little brands. That makes it easy not to talk about their cattle."

"They keep sheep, too, you tell me. And I've always heard that sheepmen and cattlemen were traditional enemies. Yet you seem friendly enough to these people."

"Shucks," said Emil. "We don't enjoy sheep drifting on our ranges, especially when the range is neither ours or the sheepmen's, but Uncle Sam's. This bunch keeps their sheep on their own range, and they never bother anyone. They run their sheep north of their town and their cows down this way. Your own folks, the N-8 outfit, are the closest neighbors, and they get on fine with the Fuentes *gente*. They're right nice folks, and that's a fact. I'm not right sure but what they're the best we've got. You lay over a day and get acquainted. You'll like 'em."

"Are they all Mexicans?"

"Well, I think you might maybe call them Americans—considerin'," said Emil mildly. "They may almost be called the first Americans, you might say. But they're not all of the Spanish blood, if that's what you mean. Two or three generations ago, a wild pack of Scotch strolled down the mountain from Canada—a mess of Murrays and Mars and Stewarts —and the Fuentes people married up with them considerable. Like I told you last night, the Fuentes family think themselves the pick of the bunch—proud as old man Lucifer. Seems, though, that they allowed these Scotch lads was in their class—for they sure assimilated them a-plenty. And during the war, in sixty-two, we sent a crowd up here to fix the map over."

"We?" said John Sayles, interrupting.

"Texas. My dad was one of them. But the Mexicans didn't want the map monkeyed with. We cleaned up the regulars, but the Mexicans give us a damn good lickin' at Glorieta Pass. Oh, yes, there was more of 'em than there was of us. That was their privilege; that's part of the game—outnumber the other fellows when you can: no kick about that. Well, sir, they just naturally wiped up the face of the earth with us." Emil paused to laugh at himself. "Us? I've heard tell about it so much that I almost forget I wasn't there."

"Why, I never even heard that the war touched this country," said John Sayles.

"Nope. No press-agent. But it's like I'm telling you. And after they turned us back, they never let up on us, day or night. Chased us four hundred miles, into the brush beyond El Paso. The boys split up every which way, so at least some of 'em could get away. Scared? Hell, no! Stubborn. Didn't want to surrender—especially after all the big talk they'd made. Heap easier to surrender than to run. Mighty few of them got through. My dad was eight months reachin' San Antone, and he was half scarecrow and half skeleton when he made it. I reckon they had a sorry time of it, poor boys. That's all they was, John—just boys, like you. Over in the San Andres once, I found where one of 'em had hid his saddle in a big juniper. Wild grapevines growin' clear to the top of the tree. So I dug there for water—grapevines are sure watersign, you know. After a spell I spied the saddle way up in the top—an old McClellan. Four or five years after, I found one of his spurs, up on top of a big hill, overlookin' the water. I've often wondered about him." Emil fell into a musing silence, and roused himself with an effort, sighing.

"I bet his mother thought he was the finest baby that ever happened. Wonder if he got through? . . . What was I going to say? Oh, yes! Well, the Fuentes boys, they was among those present at the fighting and the chasing; they liked the old map, just the way it was. And they brought back a lot of prisoners. So the girls nursed 'em back to life, looked 'em over and married the likeliest of 'em—Caldwells and Hills and a Claiborne or two. They fatted the rest of

'em up and turned 'em loose. Mighty particular, the Fuentes stock. So if you contemplate matrimony much—what are you laughing at? Just you wait till you see the reigning belle. She's one raving little beauty, Helen is—Miss Elena Mar Fuentes—here's to her! Good kid, too."

"Really—this is so sudden," laughed the boy. "I—I am too young yet."

"Well, I'm telling you," said Emil. "If your family tree isn't just about the proper thing in trees, you'll save yourself trouble by riding straight on to the N-8 ranch today."

"Fuentes must be quite a town," remarked John Sayles.

"No. Maybe a hundred people. Not counting kids: they just estimate them, there's so many. They wander off to the outside as they grow up, mostly, of late years especially. You find them everywhere. Good stock: a finger in every pie. We'll soon be in sight of the town. John Sayles, you'd better tell me something about your grandfather and his grandfather, just in case. Old Timoteo will be wanting to know, when you begin making sheep's eyes at little Helen."

John Sayles elevated his eyebrow. "You think I will certainly do that?"

"Young man," said Emil severely, "if I thought you wouldn't, I'd tip this wagon over on you. Mind you, it will do you no good unless your family has been drawn and quartered: but when little Helen's eyes say Come, you'll never stop to ask Where. You'll go. And sing! Oh, man! Wait till she springs one of those old Spanish *canciones* on you! Or the old Scotch songs, for that matter. Helen of Kirkconnel, frinstance. Ask her for that."

"I'm waiting!" declared the boy gaily. "And now how about the N-8 people? You haven't wised me up on them."

"Good waddies, every one. Only four of 'em, you know; it's only a little outfit. Spike Gibson is the foreman. Wise old bird. You hearken to Spike. No kin to old man Gibson. Spike hates him worse than poison. Don't blame him much—the old man is one bad actor. But Spike, he's a real person. You follow Spike's dust and you'll be all right."

"Mr. James," said John Sayles diffidently, "do you think I can ever get to ride wild horses like the boys do?"

"Sure you can. Any one can do it that's got the nerve

and no intelligence. Why, Steve tells me you forked that Redlegs like an old-timer."

"But he was all tired out," objected John Sayles. "I couldn't stay on at all until he wore himself out bucking in that deep sand. Anyway, I think he was ashamed to throw me off any more, and let me stay on at the last just to please me and by way of being polite."

"Son," said Emil, "that's the right spirit, but you've got me all mixed up. If you've got sense enough to know that, why aren't you smart enough to let some one else ride the wild ones—hey? Tell me, did Steve let the hammer down?"

"Did Steve—what?"

"Did Steve uncock Redlegs for you?"

"I don't get you—that is to say, pawdon me, me good man?"

"Did Mister Stephen Wildcat Thompson, Esquire, ride that pet of his first to take a little of the triple extract of concentrated hell out of him?"

"He did not," said John Sayles indignantly. "What do you take me for?"

"Well, then," said Emil, "you know the worst. When you can ride Redlegs in the first fine careless rapture, as Pierre Hines describes it, you've done learned a trade. Now what are you looking so thoughtful about?"

"Why—I wondered——" John Sayles hesitated a moment, and then blurted out the question that had been trembling on his lip for days. "What have all you people got against Mr. Logan, that nobody mentions his name?"

"Him?" said Emil in well-feigned surprise. "Why, Logan's been gone away for quite some years. I reckon we've pretty nigh forgot him."

"You haven't forgotten other people, I notice—and some of them dead and gone three hundred years. Nate Logan has not forgotten you, I can tell you that: he told me you were all fine people: he keeps the old N-8 ranch and brand that he needs just as much as I need a teething-ring. You make me feel that this concerted silence is your way of talking scandal."

"I'll tell you how it is," said Emil. "Since Nate left us he got to be a big man—millionaire, railroad-maker and all that. So all this no-talk that you notice is maybe-so pure envy on our part."

John Sayles saw that his question was evaded: he was puzzled and hurt by it.

That night John Sayles sat in an old garden of Fuentes town, and listened entranced to the dim sagas of three centuries. Stately Don Timoteo told those old tales with grave and measured cadences, stroking his long, gray beard: young Tim, facing him across the table, drank in the high talk: his eye sparkled, his smooth face flushed with pride: while his cousin, young Billy Murray, listened sullenly, his eyes on the table. Contrary to prediction, the bright eyes of Helen Fuentes left John Sayles unfluttered. He was too much taken up with the delight of his first personal touch with ancient romance: and dainty Helen, demure at her grandfather's side, felt herself half-resentful of this careless stranger.

Then came Lone Miller, riding late from the Malibu. For him, supper was served afresh under the ancient apple-tree; for him, the talk was turned to last week's catastrophe at the Golden Fleece, with courteous questionings from Don Timoteo, soft exclamations from Elena. Miller made but a sorry tale of it, slurring his own great part.

"That was well done indeed: that day should earn a song, the wages of the brave. But why did you not send here for assistance?" said Don Timoteo regretfully. "We were closer than San Clemente: my young men would have gone gladly, proud to have borne a part in that great labor.—Or to the Morgans, who were even closer? I love not the Morgans very greatly, but I am very sure they would have proved good men in your need."

"But you see, your people are not miners—except Billy here," said Miller, smiling as he laid his hand on young Billy's shoulder. Old Timoteo frowned: Billy Murray's mining was like to win for the young man a bride not to the old man's liking. Miller went on:

"For the Morgans, though they were nearest of all, they are few and scattered, they ride abroad too much: we could not chance finding them: it was a matter of hours or minutes. Nor are the Morgans miners, for all their name and blood."

After a little, at the urging of John Sayles, the talk went

back to the old days. They were down as far as 1770 now, to Baltazar the Dream-Maker, and his song of the Witch Hills. But Billy Murray would smoke.

"Here is too much talk of ancestors, too much senseless pride," declared Billy, hotly rebellious. "They are all clean daft about their Peñalosa, and Stewarts and Murrays, and the whole weary clamjamphrey of 'em. We are all Americans.

"The old *jefe* still objects to Katie Quinn, then?" said Emil, sympathetically.

"Object? Goodness, Agnes, I should say so! The one crime he can't forgive is not being an aristocrat. I'm fed up with it. I'm off. Going to San Clemente tomorrow, and take on with Tom Quinn again. Miller and me, we've found a good vein of soft coal, way beyond the San Quentin. Miller tell you of it?"

"Yes."

"It will be a big thing some day, when the railroad runs through here. Van Atta split a big bunch of money to all the Golden Fleece men. Made 'em take it: swore up and down it was no bonus but money earned; wouldn't take nary No for an answer. With that and what I can earn in the mines, Miller's going to develop our coal claim."

"And you're going to become an ancestor yourself?"

Billy's blush could be seen by starlight.

"Well, you needn't stammer about it," said Emil. "She's a fine girl, Katie. None better. And you'll get no better pardner than Lone Miller, either."

Billy glanced at his friend, troubled: opened his mouth for speech, but thought better of it.

"And Miller is my rival, too? Is that what you are not saying? Well, much good it does us. I am thinking that Bennie Morgan will never marry any man now," said Emil, simply and without shame. "But if she does—well, that was a true word I was saying of Miller: and if Bennie May ever marries, she will find no better mate than the quiet little man in yonder. Billy, if you ever have a grudge at old Emil, you get Doc Hughes to tell Bennie about Miller at the Golden Fleece. Gad! the old scoundrel ha[illegible]dus fair blubberin'! No surprise, of course: we knew Miller was all there: Bennie knows. But she ought to hear Doc tell the story, at that!"

CHAPTER VI

PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

THE next morning, Miller rode on with John Sayles to the N-8 ranch, where he purposed to buy a team for his new venture.

"Now Billy," said Emil. "Let's you and me make two swaps: one for temporary accommodation to both of us and one for keeps. You let me have a horse and your saddle: and you drive my team back to town. That will be easier for you, and I'll wander in later."

"Got you!" said Billy. "You can take Ginger. What else?"

"I want a third interest in that coal mine you and Miller found."

"Oh, you do?" jeered Billy. "What you got to trade that's worth having, I'd like to know? That coal mine is a big thing."

"I'll give you a third interest in something just as big. Trade with you, sight unseen."

"Give it a name, anyhow."

"One-third interest in the most valuable homestead in the world," said Emil. "And you can see it yourself, while I take your word for the coal. Your word is good. Only I want your name as witness to my homestead notice. Located it yesterday—half a mile north of Barnaby Bright."

"Half a mile north? What in thunder is the good of a homestead there, I'd like to know?"

"I didn't word that right, anyhow," said Emil. "I can't promise anyone an interest in my homestead. Got to swear to that when I make my entry. What I mean to say is that I'll give you fellows a third of whatever I get for sale of a right-of-way across my homestead. I located at the foot of

the cliff just opposite the last bend in Barnaby Bright Pass, and the papers call for four forties due west. That takes in most of the Pass: a ready-made tunnel worth three million to the railroad that is bound to come some day, and that must go through Barnaby Bright."

"Hell!" said Billy. "Now, why couldn't I think of that? And me born and raised here! All right, sir, it's a trade—and there goes part of a perfectly good coal mine!"

"Cheer up! Your coal mine—I mean our coal mine—won't be any good till the railroad reaches it. You haven't lost anything. And I'll help put up for development work. You come on down an witness my location notice. Then you'd better wait here till Miller comes back and break the news to him. 'Tisn't strictly necessary to tell anyone else, till I get ready to build me a house. I've got six months to start it. 'Twouldn't be a bad idea for you to locate the west end of the Gap, too. My claim doesn't cover all of it."

"I'll do that," said Billy.

"All right, then—I'll tell the old don *adios* and we'll go. I'll give you an order on the store for my part of the truck: may not be in till the roundup starts."

The homestead notice was witnessed, and Billy turned back to Fuentes. Emil rode south across the flat to Malibu Mountain, to a cañon fronting the north—Mockingbird, latest home of the Morgans.

Emil rode slowly. The dim trail he followed held arrow-straight to the mouth of Mockingbird, crossing the innumerable little winding ridges and draws that fell away from the base of Red Mesa.

He passed the last of the Fuentes' herds and was not yet come to the outmost line of the Morgan cattle: the tall grama rippled in gray waves to his feet; quartz and mica sparkled and shone in the hills before him. Then the breeze died away, the sun beat down through the hushed air. The heat rose quivering, visible; the hills dimmed and blurred in a haze of luminous dust-motes, the far off sands became a dazzle of unbearable white brilliance, the dark bare lowlands billowed and heaved, the Witch Hills rose and took shape, wavering, fantastic, wonderful: the locust shrilled across the silent noon.

Lonely, desolate, forlorn? Not to him. He dwelt in the glowing heart of life, an uproarious Valhalla, where each day a man might do greatly: his heart laughed, the blood pounded lustily in his ears, his eyes took hold on all delight.

To his thought he rode the crowded lists of joy with all his thronging peers, young gods in a young world, where they made sport with nimble life. No poor, penny world, theirs, but an endless and enthralling book, the very footnotes of it tingling with delight: a blue and gold world, radiant with mountain and dune and plain, the deep-lit glowing stars, freshness of tender dawns and thrilling dusks, long, cool shadows at nightfall, brooding noons and wide, clean skies, the great free winds and the strong white sun, the silences, the wastrel echoes of the hills, the tense passion of the mocking bird's call that woke them in the Blue Bedroom to see the morning made.

He was a little proud of it, that Universe, and it caused him no anxiety. He felt that it was a Universe made On Purpose, not a forgotten blunder; felt unshrinkingly sure that He purposed good and not evil, Who loved all these things well enough to make them beautiful. The phrase Emil used to voice this feeling may sound profane, but it was not such by intention. When he remarked gravely, "God was surely onto His job," he meant nothing but simple admiration and gratitude.—Day after day taught him this wisdom: night after night whispered this counsel.

The Witch Hills of the mirage swirled and quivered before him as he rode, thankful for their beauty with all the rest; thankful most of all for the crowning wonder and delight, which, like the clustered worlds that neighbored him, like all the hourly miracles that jostled him, was wrought of mist and dust and water and fire; the grey-eyed maid whose face was the end of his road, of all his roads.

"It will be right lonesome for you, come round-up time," suggested Emil.

Bennie May laughed. "Lonesome? I don't know what the word means. I'm fixing to raise a big garden, now that we have water enough to irrigate. That is, I will if Joe ever gets the fence built. That will keep me busy."

"You have a flower garden, too? I hope," said Emil, "that you are not growing effeminate."

"I'm afraid so. I was boyish, rather, wasn't I? A tomboy?"

"A Bennie-boy. Not quite like any one else that ever was," said Emil, explicitly.

"Besides," said Bennie May, quickly, "Kitty Barstow is coming over for a long visit. Perhaps Effie Howland, with the marvelous baby, will come, too. Aunt Jen wrote to invite her last week. Of course we haven't had time for an answer yet, but I'm pretty certain she'll come."

"Let me see!" said Emil reflectively, "you're known me quite some time, haven't you?"

"Four years," said Bennie May.

"And I've never offered you any advice?"

"Never."

"Well, then," said Emil, "I will. You tell me your dad and Webb are boring a well half way between here and Barnaby Bright: and you all but said that you hoped they wouldn't find any water in it."

"Now, Emil, I didn't say anything that could be twisted to such a meaning."

Emil waved the protest aside. "No matter. Such is your half-hope—*no es verdad?*"

Bennie May Morgan's clear grey eyes met the visiting blue eyes for communion more swift than speech: it was her way to meet perplexity squarely.

"I don't know how you guess it; but it is the truth."

"It is no guess. I have the greatest respect and liking for your esteemed parent. But neither affection nor foresight blind me to the fact that he is a metallic old man, with one steel foot and one cast-iron head. Without intending anything of the sort, he is the easiest man in the world to get along with. Just let me have his own way about everything and there was never a better neighbor. And if not, not."

"You are a severe judge, Emil."

Emil shook his head. "Far be it from me to contra-say—but severe judge is not the word at all. Accurate observer—impartial and incorruptible Emil—that's me. And you're afraid the new well may start new trouble by bringing on a collision with the Fuentes clan?"

"That's just it. There's a big strip of No Man's Land between us now, and I wish it could stay that way."

"Well," said Emil, "it won't. They'll get water. I've studied that country; before ever so many years there's going to be so much water found along under Red Mest—artesian wells, I shouldn't wonder—that the whole country will be spoiled for stock-raising. You'll see! But in the meantime, Webb and Steelfoot Morgan get water; they stock up with cattle. Their stuff wanders all over the Fuentes range, while the Fuentes stock stay at home, and the Fuentes grass gets heap short. There's your trouble. Old Don Timoteo is proud as Lucifer, and he has a clear case of here first. I couldn't very well say to you that Steelfoot Morgan is an arbitrary, stiff-necked and overbearing old gentleman. But that is precisely the kind of an old gentleman Timoteo Fuentes is, and I can say that if ever there was a well-matched pair on earth, Don Timoteo and Steelfoot Morgan are that couple."

"Yon don't say anything about Webb?"

"No," said Emil, "I don't. It isn't being done this year."

Bennie sighed. "I will, then. He eggs father on—or rather, they egg each other on. I declare, father ought to have been lord of some island, undisputed owner of every inch to the water's edge. He would be the kindest man and chieftain alive. And Jim Webb is just as bad. I don't see how he and father ever managed to get along together all these years."

"Well, then,—everyone else sees." A cloud came over Emil's sunny eyes: rarest occurrence. Bennie smiled faintly and shook her head, ever so slightly, in reproof—not of Emil, but of that unaccustomed cloud: which vanished obediently.

The story must obtrude a word. When a girl is so far forward in a man's thoughts that glance or gesture answers his unvoiced thought more clearly than any spoken word can ever do—then that girl is none so unyielding as Bennie May fancied she was toward Emil. The story has used the wrong word. Bennie May was girl no longer, but woman-grown; twenty-three now, and taught by sorrow. It was five years since the year of the great rains.

Bennie's thoughts trailed away: she roused herself with a

start and in some confusion. "You were mentioning advice?" she said, sweetly.

"So good of me, wasn't it?" said Emil. His eye rested on a little blue flower which Bennie wore on her bosom. He knew that blue blossom as one of the flowers of that year of the great rains; knew that since that memorable year Bennie had kept a little watered garden of those nameless flowers. "Disinterested, too. Here is my advice. Ask little Helen Fuentes to visit you here and to meet your friends when they come: ask Don Timoteo with her: make your father stay at home. They are two stubborn old men, but two pairs of bright eyes may turn the trick: their old hearts are soft enough, even if their old heads are hard. If their womankind are friendly, it will come nearer holding them back from foolishness than anything else. You'll like little Helen too: she's a nice kid."

"I'll do it," said Bennie. "You wear well, Emil; you have a reserve of unsuspected and surprising qualities. Who would have suspected you of diplomacy?"

"My dear, I am all diplomacy. You are unappreciative. Haven't I had a plausible reason for every visit I have ever made to your extremely perambulatory home, or homes?"

"This is a beautiful place—I hope it will be my last home." said Bennie, wistfully.

"I don't," said Emil, with emphasis. "That reminds me—I haven't decided on my reason for this trip yet. Must be getting that all arranged before the men-folks ride in. Who all is here now, Bennie?"

"Only a few—father, Joe and Harry, and Carl Middaugh. Tank and the other boys are at the new well."

"I'm sorry about Henry, too," said Emil, cheerfully. "Joe is so much taken up with his bronco-twistin' that he doesn't notice anything else—but that youngest brother of yours is highly intelligent. That statement goes double for Jim Webb, too."

"I wish you wouldn't, Emil!"

"My coarse and cheerful character," said Emil, "is hereby repressed in disgrace: I make haste to change the subject, with my customary graceful ease, by remarking—ah! uh! er! oh, yes! listen!—It is well worth your while to establish social relations with little Helen and her interesting grand-

parent. You spoke of your father as the ideal chieftain. There is the great danger: Don Timoteo is a chieftain right out of the middle ages: all the young men of Fuentes are lifted up with legendary exploits of their ancestors. The Scotch loons are as bad or worse than the Spanish Cavaliers, all except Billy Murray and maybe Hank Mar: they have lucid intervals."

"I have heard of their democratic leanings," said Bennie. "Railroad men, aren't they?"

"Henry Mar is: Billy's girl is a miner. Leastways old Tom Quinn is a miner. Little Katie, she is in El Paso now. To resume where you so rudely interrupted: these high-spirited young laddie-bucks are not afraid of anything on earth; quite sadly otherwise. They've been brought up on those old stories: their everyday talk is couched in the high-sounding imagery of war; they're eaten up with the crazy idea that fighting is the only way to prove manhood. Young Tim and little Charlie Stewart are the worst bitten: I believe they will be greatly disappointed if the Morgans don't crowd them. They look forward with great joy to the chance of a nice little war. Clan jealousy, that's the danger: the fame of the Morgan clan makes them ashamed of being peaceable folk —little idiots!—Understand me well, young lady. You are to confine your social amenities to little Helen and cousin Alice and Don Timoteo. Young Tim is not to be tolerated under any circumstances, nor Charlie Stewart. That is final."

"Me lud, it shall be done," said Bennie May. "Having now made an end of my affairs, let us at this late last go on to yours. What have you been doing with, by, and for yourself? A fine hostess I am not to have asked you before. You will be thinking me a very selfish person."

"The last time I told you what I thought of you," said Emil slowly, "you were not pleased. I therefore beg to be excused. You know, anyway.—Dear Madam: Answering your esteemed question of even date; what have I been doing by myself?—Beg to reply: I have been very busy."

"Busy?" scoffed Bennie. "I see you being busy. And at what, pray?"

"I have been very busy," repeated Emil firmly, "not making rules for God; not pulling off desperate coups and shady,

hair-trigger intrigues for His advantage: not dealing 'em from the bottom for Him. Then it uses up so much of my energy not running about re-arranging other people's minds for them, making them Just like Me. And one other thing takes up my time a good deal, too.—There! Just as I thought! Yonder comes your dad and your brothers, and me with my mind not yet made up as to why I came. Go 'way! You distract my attention so I can't decide on my story. Go help your aunt Jen!"

"But what was the other thing?" asked Bennie, rising.

Emil rose and faced her: he took her hands. "I have been watching the Witch Hills, Bennie. They are so unreal, so beautiful, so far away; they seem somehow tangled up with some far-off wonder and happiness which might come into my life, some day. They are not there, those mirage-hills: but all men dream and say that they picture forth nothing which is not somewhere real. . . . There is somewhere a home for you more beautiful and dear than Mockingbird, Bennie. . . . If you should ever meet me in the Witch Hills, we might find that place together.—If you only could, Bennie May!"

Again the grey eyes met the blue; and Bennie's eyes—not unkindly, not untenderly—said No.

Now, was she not strangely inconsistent, Bennie May Morgan? Like the rest of us?—She mourned Clay Mundy: it was for memory of him that the grey eyes said No. Emil knew what all men knew, how this girl had knelt in Luna churchyard, for all to see, and kissed Clay Mundy, dead. What he could not know, what no man knew, was that she cherished a flower linked not with Mundy but with the memory of that other man who was, presumably, the slayer of Mundy. Presumably; no man knew or guessed the truth. Or, if there were three who guessed, they had best reasons for silence. The man Hamerick had disappeared like a stone cast into the sea. His two guilty confederates stood between suspicion of a double murder on the one hand and the wrath of the Morgans on the other.—And Bennie May Morgan? Did she half-divine something which she would never suffer her thought to shape, to half-shape, and so, shielding, forgive them both?

THE SPRING WORK

VII

RETURN OF THE NATIVE

THE V Cross T was working the dayherd. To-morrow the strays would be travelling homeward over many roads, and the steer-shipping would begin.

John Sayles Watterson, Jr., held the N 8 cut, with a sharp eye for the thrilling drama of the roundup, when the dust curtain raised enough for sight. Circling the herd were a dozen similar "cuts," each pertaining to a different brand, each keeping about the same distance from its neighbors and from the main herd. To them, at short intervals, cattle streamed out of the dust, singly or by two's or three's; at times a resolute steer broke for liberty, to be circled back by a swift horseman, or roped and towed back, at need.

Behind was the infinite expanse of rolling plateau: before him John Sayles saw, first the wagons at the camp, then the white walls of Ridgepole huddled at the end of Magdalena mountain; higher, the mines and the roofs of Kelly bright against the blue slope: eastward to Lemitar mountain, the broad mesa plunged reckless down the valley of the Rio Grande: beyond was the flat sunlit mesa and the far, dim line of Oscura.

A horseman grew from the dust, and rode out to him: but John Sayles, busy with his restless charges, had scant time to look until the rider was within hail.

"Well young man, this is quite a change from Baltimore and Washington. How're you making it?

"Mr. Logan!" John Sayles grasped eagerly at the older man's hand. "Let me thank you for steering me up against all this. When did you come? Today? Gee, I'm glad to see you!"

"Oh no, I came a week ago," said Logan. "Been to San Clement and up to the north work. I'm on my way back to civilization now. Hope you're ready to go with me?"

The boy drew a wry face. "Not ready—no, nix, not. Heap plenty good time. Besides I've got so I can stay on a bucking horse every little while. Learning to talk conversation, too. But I've got to go, ready or not. I promised the mother. So I'm with you soon as I see these steers loaded. And the family Mr. Logan? They are well, I trust?"

"They are all at Colorado Springs, when I join them we're going to the coast, by way of Yellowstone Park—except Kinks, who, I believe, intends to stay where she is, permanently. She has a burro as big as a black dog, and intends to renounce her other family ties." Fond pride was in his tone: you would not guess the empire builder of Broad Street and Pennsylvania Avenue. "Bob isn't anxious to leave, either: he is second baseman for the twelve year kids; very skeptical about geysers and the big trees. You know—you played at Princeton, didn't you?"

"Two years," said John Sayles proudly—wishing that the older man might see his press notices. Of course, *he* couldn't show them himself, but the *mater* knew where he kept them. Mothers are dense, sometimes.

"The wife sends her regards and invites you to come with us. I would have asked you myself, but as you know, an invitation is not valid except it be legibly endorsed by the wife or other head of the house—among civilized folks, that is. Of course, for out here—Logan waved his hand—"like my invitation to the ranch—that was different."

"Oh, it's awfully jolly of her and it would be a grand stunt to go. But mother wants me to come home."

Logan smiled. "We'll wire your mother. It isn't so much that she wants you to come home as that she wants to get you away from here. I happen to know, for it was I who advised her, in a moment of remorse."

"Mr. Logan! She ought to be jolly well glad to have me here." Here a dry cow decided to visit the herd. When John Sayles brought her back the look of incredulous protest was still frozen on his face. "Why I've learned more about—about real things, about being—well, what dad would have wanted me to be—Aw, leggo, you're pulling my leg!"

"No, I mean it. This is the pit whence I was digged—I know. You're young, your head is full of romantic trash; you're in just the right stage of development to pick up ideas that will do you an irreparable harm. These fellows are ignorant, uncouth, unashamed and incompetent—"

"Come, I say now! Incompetent! By Jove!" John Sayles fairly exploded. "Come again! The poorest hand amongst them is a miracle of efficiency. There isn't one of them but goes at the meanest piece of work as if his life depended on doing that one thing well as Julius Caesar could do it. At least as well, and in less time!"

"What do they get by it?"

"They get by with it!" snapped John Sayles.

"You evade," said Logan indulgently. "I will answer then. Not enough to buy your cigars."

John Sayles was silent.

"Their muscles are well trained. So far you are right," pursued Logan. "But where does it get them? They earn nothing and they learn nothing. So far from using their brains, they do not even use their muscles wisely. For no greater skill, the ball player reaps fame and fortune."

"With no more skill, and far less pain and danger, the prize-fighter wins a fortune," answered John Sayles, promptly. "Is he the better man? Is money the only test?"

"He is the wiser man, at least. That is exactly the point. These fellows sacrifice everything else so they can go their own way just as they please and keep their so called 'independence'—with no provision for the future. They will not accept orders——"

"I have been here two months, and I have not heard an order given yet," said John Sayles dryly. "Every man knows what to do and when to do it. He does it without orders. And every man-jack of them tries to do it first! Is that a fault? Why, if you had men who would do that, you would hold them invaluable. And independence? Since when has that been a crime? Isn't it self-respect—even exaggerated self-respect —better than cringing obsequiousness of our tip-takers? Money be jiggered!" John Sayles rolled up his eyes in sudden piety. "The Coney Islanders are a feeble folk, but they roll in the rocks!" he said solemnly. "Me, I like the waddies better."

"The foreman, even, don't get enough to pay your monthly tips, young man. And they never will. Look here, John—I was one of these fellows myself: but with more brains and more ambition, I hope. When the Mexican Central was built, I saw a chance and risked everything on it. I took a sub-contract under Joe Hampson. That was my start; and I never took a step back. I tried to get some of the very men who are here to-day to go in with me on that contract. Would they do it? No! They preferred to gamble——"

"We will skip the gambling," announced John Sayles, "and the cow stealing."

"Touch"! said Logan gaily. "As you so delicately do not say, I have gambled for the highest stakes—and won. Say then, that they were foolish to gamble and lose. Say, if you prefer it, that they are foolish to play fair against opponents who do not play fair. They are stupid, stubborn, these men. Magnificent animals—no more."

"Is fair play nothing, then? faithfulness? splendid courage?"

"Ah, courage!" said Logan, "There we have it! Now we touch bottom. Yes, they are brave, fearless—idiotically so, and aimlessly so. For a whim, a dare a dollar a day, to show off, to catch a yearling, for sheer stubbornness, for no cause at all, they risk life and limb a dozen times a day. That is what wins your young affection. Young man, young man! It is high time you came home. You have read too much Sir Walter Scott. This is no place for you. Courage—animal courage—may be an admirable quality——"

"Vegetable courage is a rare and lovely thing," said John Sayles. "Or is it mineral courage that you most admire?"

Logan ignored the interruption. "Courage is doubtless an admirable quality, but it is needless to such men as you and I. The intelligent civilized man seldom learns either that he has courage or that he lacks it. We use foresight and judgment instead. We pay our soldiers to do our fighting for us; we pay the hewers of wood to take our risks—sand-hogs, bridge builders, railroaders, cowboys, miners, the thousand others. We profit by tunnel and bridge, railroad and mine and beef, but we let these excellent, admirable and blind savages do the work and take the risks."

"I do not like you much," remarked John Sayles Watterson, Jr.

Logan's jolly laugh rang out. He was quite unoffended. "How independence corrupts good manners, John! I put it crudely by way of putting it forcibly—to offset the crude ideas you have adopted here. You think it out at your leisure."

"I cannot talk as well as you do, Mr. Logan. But I am sure you are wrong."

" 'Me hear-rt rejects your evil counsel' "—as they say in the second act." Logan laughed again. "You remind me of poor Cullom. Graduate of Middleton, our best engineering school —brilliant man—one of the best positions in the gift of the I. C. C. for a starter. And over on the East Side, a gutter-brat got in the way of an automobile. Cullom jumped to the rescue. Result, one guttersnipe saved for crime or misery or both; one first class man crippled for life."

"It seems tough, at that. But suppose that child had been Kinks? I make the suggestion with diffidence, because of the term gutter-brat. It was your word and not mine: which cheerful thought emboldens me to mention Kinks. And parents of gutter-brats have words of their own to describe such fortunate children as Kinks—words quite as ugly and senseless as gutter-brat. So I proceed. Suppose that inconsiderate child had been Kinks?"

Logan frowned. "It could not have been Kinks. Kinks is watched and guarded every hour of her life."

"Yet that child was Kinks or Bob to someone," insisted John Sayles.

Logan waved the motion aside with an angry hand. Nonsense! "Those people are mere two-legged animals. John Sayles, John Sayles! Men like you and Cullom are not free to choose. You are reared to be leaders of men. Years of toil and care are lavished on your training—you have absolutely no right to even yourselves with the scum and offscourings of the earth. You are like the Man with Ten Talents; much shall be required of you. If Cullom had been married and had children—even then, you would think it was his duty to fling away his life for a notion, I suppose?"

"Mr. Logan, you can out-talk me. I shall fall back on

quotation. It was Brann of Waco who said this word concerning children, and I think it covers the case:—'Better to die in the faith that they were sired by freeman, than to live in the hateful knowledge that they were spawned by slaves.' And these men that you despise are freemen. Thy are free to choose: the choice you deny to Cullom and to me."

"Young blood," said Logan, his face darkening. "Oh, very generous, very highminded—but it wont work out. The world today, and all it has to give, is for enlightened selfishness—for the Obermann, if you please. You will see differently ten years from now, when you are under bond, when you have given hostages to fortune. But today you bear me hard, I admit it: you and the outworn thought you speak for."

Katy, Logan's pony, grown gray in the service, was aggrieved at his inglorious station. He pawed and twisted: he cocked ear and eye at the straining herd where his heart was. Once,—oh, long ago and long ago!—Katy had been pet and pride of the Bar Cross, far to the southward. They still tell of the loot which changed hands on a wager as to which could soonest cut out fifty steers of the same brand, Katy, or the Tom Ross Baldy horse. Katy won by a single steer.

"Here's a sample, this Katy horse," said Logan bitterly. "I ride him because he is safe and sensible: or I ride other old and quiet horses. That is what a sensible man ought to do, a man with a family to think of, a man of years and responsibility. What do I get for it? Sneers and sidelong glances—ridicule at the very best!" His face flamed red: his splendid chest heaved with sudden passionate anger. "Watterson, I was a boy here: yes, and a man with the best of them. All these years, I have kept the old ranch through a sneaking sentimental affection for the country and the boys—confound their insolence! But you've not heard any heartfelt queries about me, have you?"

John Sayles had not, and he had wondered at it. "But no one has said a word against you, Mr. Logan!"

"No! That's it: they ignore me: I'm beneath their notice!" Here N. P. Logan, the empire builder, permitted himself the use of idle words.. "I'd rather they'd abuse me. Listen: I'll tell you what they didn't say. When I was here last, four years ago, a foolish, worthless ne'er-do-well, Andy Connor,

half cow-thief and half desperado, was riding a wild horse on the rim at Blue Mesa. You've been there?"

John Sayles nodded.

"His horse fell, his foot hung; they went over the edge. I was the nearest: and because I didn't follow and rope his horse on that slide I am ostracized. And me with a wife and two babies: Kinks was not a year old then. I stayed a month after that. I didn't get a kind word or a kind look. Cold civility from old friends: slur and slight from the rest. Watterson, I had no right to go down that slide! My family aside, I was the moving spirit—yes, I may say it, it is true—in enterprises wherein the savings of thousands, the chance for work and the entire wellbeing of other thousands depended—which would collapse without me like a card house, with ruin, suicide, misery and crime to mark the wreck.

"There was more than even that to consider. For Connor's own sake, I had no right to go. I had not roped for years, nor ridden hard: I was not fit. Connor's horse was not at top speed at first: the slide cowed him: he sidled and edged, he was half-minded to climb back to the top. Had I followed and missed my throw, Connor would have been dragged to shreds. Johnny Dines went. He was in practice, he caught the horse at the first cast: Connor was not even badly hurt. And I—I am an outcast in the only land I really cared about, a byword with the people I love best! I'll not stand it. I'll never come back. And, I tell you again, after four years of thinking it over—I had no right to go down that slide."

CHAPTER VIII

THE SHIPPING PENS

"One Box W, three V Cross T's, Square and Compass, one K Y—let 'em go!" The inspector's quirt slapped sharply on his boot leg; six steers slid along the fence like stealthy ghosts; the inspector's horse turned back unbidden. These three things took place simultaneously. A fourth was on their heels. *"Tally!"* The word cracked like a whip. Street and Horsethief Fisher, tally keepers, snapped it together.

Tails aflaunt, the steers streaked down the stock-yards lane, between the heavy timbered twelve-foot fence; they flipped round a corner with a kick; a heavy gate closed behind them; a rider started from ambush and choused them on to the waiting-pens.

The inspector paced soberly back with Cole Ralston, the V Cross T boss, who "pushed 'em through." Near the gate, they croweded the inner fence, under the dangling feet of spectators and amateur tally-keepers. A bunch broke from the pen, shied, kicked and scurried down the lane, two abreast, dust-hidden. The inspector did not move.

"One S S Bar, one H A M, one Hook-and-Ladder, one N 8, two V Cross T's"—"Tally."

A horse slipped on his side in the cutting pen, and rose, bucking: the herd charged for the open gate of the lane. Emil James and "Dallas" McCombs thrust their horses into the living flood and it swirled back for some magic of word and waving hats. The leaders crushed down the lane: Ralston "strung 'em out," so they dribbled by in a charging column rather than as a locked phalanx. The inspector raced beside them, barking crisp italics.

"H G T, two V Cross T, two Double Ess Barr, S L Y, four V Cross T, N 8, K Y, Half Circle Cross, 76, N U N,

V Cross T, one Spur—let 'em go! MO-ORE STRAW!"

"Tally!"

John Sayles gasped. With all his eyes he had caught but one brand as this wild mob thundered by—the familiar N 8. That was on a steer he knew by flesh marks: he was hardly sure if he had indeed seen the brand, or merely thought so because he knew it was there. It was no new thing for John Sayles to wonder: he had found more bewildering cause in two New Mexican months than in his previous two and twenty years.

This last stage of the cow-work, like all the preceding phases, was a revelation of concentration, snap, and marvellous efficiency. To John Sayles the wonder was less that the inspector had not yet read one brand wrong than that he had ever read one right.

More straw came. "Two V Cross T's, one Pig-Pen, S U M, one Spur—*Hold 'em! Hold 'em up!*" The gate crashed quivering against the timbers. "Let 'em in the water-pen. Gip, you and Spike climb down off that fence and get your horses. Throw that pieded steer and see if the brand hasn't been burned from H O T to B O B. Saunders! —you, Bill Saunders!"

"Present!"

"Where's that B O B man, d'yuh know?"

"Over to th' saloon, I reckon. Him and old man Gibson are hitting up the booze."

"Go get him. All ri-ight! Let 'em come!"

A head and shoulders, belonging to Al Clemens appeared above the outer fence. "Hi, there, one of you huskies! Help, I need it!"

"Here I am!" said John Sayles, and walked the plank which topped the fence, stepping over and around and on to the audience. A fresh bunch of steers stormed by to the "ante-rooms". As the gate swung shut John Sayles made it a bridge to the outer world and so became aware that the gate-keeper was using expressions.

"What's wrong with the world, Tom-Dick-Bob?" inquired John Sayles. The gate tender was youngest hand of the N 8, hence detailed to the ignominy of this dull and dusty duty.

"Wrong? Wrong! This gate"—he described the gate—"is

sagged so the bolt wont catch. That section foreman—" he described the section foreman—"oughta bored another hole. Directly a car load of steers'll surge up against it—and the boy, oh where was he? I'll get so complicated with that fence you'll have to scrape me off with a plane."

John Sayles dropped into the outer sand and raced after Clemens. "What's the matter over in Macedonia, Al?"

Al pointed. "See the big red sign on the far car, alone, down at the end of the side track? That says Dynamite, Danger, *mucho cuidado!* The boys keep rolling cars down that nice little slope as they're loaded, and pretty soon they're going to bunt into that giant-powder-good-by! I set the brakes on that flock of cars as tight as I could do it alone, but every fresh car jolts 'em a little further. We'll get a handspike and all both screw up those brakes till the wheels think they're chained to the rail."

"I see!" said John Sayles. "You don't want the dynamite to explode—is that it?"

"That is the general idea, yes," admitted Al, with an admiring glance. "You're some quick in the head. By all good rights they should have left that car on another track, out of the way of the cattle cars. 'Spose some fool kid monkeyed with that brake? That car would ride that split switch, take the main line, and meet the Elevator coming up and bust her headlight. They never ought to have anything but a stub switch in such a yard as this, anyway. This kind is a plain invitation for cars to get out of the siding."

When he came back, John Sayles climbed to the platform of the loading chutes. A car was spotted, bridge and wings dropped to place. "Right!" shouted Slim and Slick in chorus. The loading pen gate swung open, two wild riders harried a bunch down the lane. The steers wheeled madly into the loading pen; followed relentlessly, they dashed up the steep chute to escape—into the car. The riders tip-toed sedately back for more. Sometimes the steers broke back at the chute. But every gate had a keeper: and a gate-keeper's business was to be quicker than a steer. With two horsemen and a half dozen frantic steers in a loading pen little larger than a box car, John Sayles expected tragedy.

But horse and man knew their business. Dust, broken

glimpses of white horns, plunged and dart and feint and twist, a bellow of rage, a shout, a sharp crack of quirt on "chaps," long *tapideros* slapped on charging heads, parry of booted foot at last need—*Ey-ah!* The last steers dashed up the chute. Where a second ago was mortal combat, two horses turned automatically to an automatically opening gate, two unmoved riders resumed a low-voiced conversation as they paced quietly along the lane.

"Hear Nate Logan's back again."

"Yes. Ain't you seen him? He's been here quite a spell?"

"Nope. I been representing. Got in last night."

"He resembles himself a heap."

"Oh, well, you needn't be abusive." Further reproof faded to indistinct murmur.

The last speaker was Mr. Steve Thompson, "Wildcat" Thompson of campfire tales; and John Sayles quoted happily to himself:

"He was a most sarcastic man, this quiet Mr. Brown,
And on several occasions he had cleaned out the town."

Sometimes, however, the steers would stubbornly refuse to enter the narrow chute for any equestrian inducements. Then the horsemen escaped miraculously through the gate: Slim and Slick, with a volunteer appanage of ambitious Ridgepole youth, dropped into the pen afoot and "fought 'em in" with prod-poles. It was more exciting than the preferred method, but really safer, for in extremity a man could climb the fence to safety. For cow-ponies can do this. But loading "by hand" was slower and used only as a last resort.

In the cutting pen the steer supply ran low. John Sayes walked the fence to the enthralling sport of watching the inspector read brands ere it was evermore too late.

A gusty puff of wind swooped his hat into the lower lane; a twenty ton missile of panic-stricken beef crashed against the gate. Tom-Dick-Bob was a grand little man, but he did not weigh twenty tons: the gate opened suddenly. Tom-Dick-Bob was not caught. Clear of the gate and cattle, he hung along the wall, making futile remarks. How he got there is not known. The cattle surged on blindly, overthrew the in-

spector, swept over him: the cutting-pen gate swung shut; they raced on and smashed to a halt against the outer gates, double and chained.

Inspector and horse scrambled up unhurt. From the fence top, Logan spoke to Tom-Dick-Bob on the fence side.

"Riley, if you can't do the work, I'll send some one down that can."

For a breath Tom-Dick-Bob hung open-mouthed on the fence, dazed by his wrongs. He dropped down, closed the gate and found speech to declare himself.

"You yellow dog—" the words came slow and clear—"I'll hold this gate till the last steer goes. And you don't fire me. I won't be fired. I work for you one year from to-day, Nate Logan—and I draw my pay. No crawling thing like you can run it over me for not being able to out-push a carload of steers. Now you go to the hotel and stay there!"

In a dead silence Logan looked down at his wrathful employee, turned and left the stock yards. No man looked after him.

"Let 'em come!" said the inspector.

CHAPTER IX

"ABOVE ALL WISDOM AND ALL SUBTLETY"

RIDGEPOLE BRANCH appears on the map as a straight spur, sticking out from the El Paso line like a sore thumb. This is an understatement.

Ridgepole is indeed the western and heavenward end of the line, and Saragossa is at the other end. But it is not a straight line.

The narrow-gauge between Clifton and Metcalf, in Arizona, is the longest line between two given points. Thirty-five miles of track make ten miles actual distance: and a slight rise. Ridgepole spur is comparatively straightforward. It requires only thirty-one miles (or twenty-seven) to accomplish sixteen miles of westing. Because of the curves, one rail is shorter than the other: the twenty-seven-mile side.

Lay a piece of paper on a common washboard: give your neighbor's six-year-old a pencil held in a pair of tongs: ask him to shut his eyes and draw a very long capital S on the paper. Turn the paper with the pencilled mark from you and hold it to the light. What you will see will be a fairly accurate map of the Ridgepole road.

It is steep, too—Ridgepole Branch. It is said that when the road was first opened a light engine could not get up the hill without a pusher. This is not verified.

Four per cent. is generally reckoned a stiff grade. Ridgepole percentages fluctuate from usury to confiscation, consistent only in this, that there is some rise for every rail from the main-line frog at Saragossa to the final spike at Kelly. There is a five-mile switch-back from Ridgepole to Kelly smelter so steep that the engine only takes up one car every two trips.

There is one mixed train—"The Elevator." It makes the

round trip once daily, oftener if required. On rare occasions another engine comes up from San Marcial to help with stock shipments. Exports are cattle, sheep, wool, hides, horses and ore; imports, food, playing cards and school ma'ams.

Near the track, at Five-Mile Cut, rode the V Cross T men and a few other men from the high country; the skeleton of the round-up crew. New flesh for those bones, in the shape of other "stray men," would appear when the work started again on the river. And when the river was worked—a mere strip some ninety miles by twenty—the spring *rodeo* would break up. Cattle are not worked in the hot-weather months.

It was late afternoon. The steers were loaded ready for the Elevator to drop them down to the main line: but the Elevator was late. The wagon had long since gone to Water Cañon with the horse herd: some of the boys were staying in Ridgepole for the night; the rest rode slowly down the trail which cuts across the long curves of the railway like the bars on the dollar mark "S."

Logan and John Sayles rode a hundred yards in advance. They threaded the huddle of hills below town and came out on a tip-tilted world where the uplands began the roaring plunge to the river. It is not absolutely claimed that South America once slid away from that wild moraine: but, had it happened, the scarred and gullied track would have been not otherwise; bare, desolate and glaring, heaped with gray boulders, studded with stubborn, earthless and glassy hill.

For a space the trail paralleled the railroad track as it came back from a little exploring trip to the north and gathered breath for the Toboggan. Thus far from Ridgepole the track sloped gently; the detour, almost on a level, was to avoid the stripling hills between: the jump-off began just ahead, with a horseshoe curve to the left as preliminary. Far away and far below the Elevator came in sight, crawling from the white cut above Water Cañon.

"It is on a par with the rest," said Logan. "Because I act like a reasonable man, I am treated like a leper. By their senseless, topsy-turvy, neck-or-nothing code, I should have gone to a finish fight with young Riley. It makes no difference that I am forty pounds heavier, that I could break him in two, that Riley knows it, that they know it, that they know I know."

In the heat, a shrill cicada jarred on his raw nerves: he fell silent. After a little he spoke again.

"As it happens, I was wrong; the bolts on the gate would not work. But that does not count one feather's weight with my valorous judges. If Riley had been wrong, 'twould be just the same. To use their own phrase, unless a man will go through with whatever he begins 'to the last ditch and then some,' he's no good. Nothing else counts. He must be ready to fight for every reason or no reason—for a foolish cause or a bad one." He laughed bitterly. "To be just, it is not needful to win. They think just as well of you if you are licked or killed—just so you demonstrate that you have more pluck than brains. It's intolerable. They're savages. They make a fetish of low brute courage: they drag out a poor, second-rate virtue and make it supersede a hundred better qualities. But of course you side in with them."

John Sayles was sore distressed. "I see your point of view, Mr. Logan, and I can understand why you're sore. But I don't think they're savages, and I don't think they're altogether wrong. We can't afford to despise this 'brute courage,' as you call it. It may not be the highest quality, but it is the one indispensable quality.—*What's that?*"

It was Death. Swift and silent, the red-labeled dynamite car swayed and rocked as it gathered speed where the track fell away at the first real hill. It was almost abreast of the V Cross T riders before they saw it: what John Sayles heard was a clamor of flying hoofs. Only fifty yards: too far! Ralston was nearest. He held his place, a length ahead, the V Cross T riders bunched behind. He flashed up the sidelong fill, the yielding earth gave under the horse's feet, held him back for a split second. Just as the fingers of one hand clutched at the iron ladder, his horse stumbled and rolled down the embankment under his straining mates: they piled up over him. Ralston's weight jerked out behind the car, his free hand grabbed vainly, his desperate hold broke, he fell heavily on the rail behind the car.

John Sayles launched his horse like a thunderbolt.—Alas, John Sayles! His mount was young, spirited, foolish. Frightened, he lunged, reared, wheeled away, pitching. The death-car's gallop became a run. One man was left—Logan.

Katy gleamed across the barrow-pit, skimmed like a swallow up the sloping bank. Belly to earth he ran, his wise feet on the slender path between tie and slope; ears back, eyes rolling, proud, glorious. Gallant Katy! Never, even in dreams, had he been sent up against a box-car! The car was at his hip—abreast—the red label flamed by—Logan's hands scraped against the car-door, the side; they closed in a death grip on the ladder, his arms were torn almost out of their sockets, his foot thrust against the saddle—he was on the ladder!

The car leaped at the head of Toboggan Slide, it plunged and rocked and fell away. Logan clung to the footboard and crawled to the front end. The car whirled into Horseshoe Bend as he grasped the brake and stood up. His blood tingled hot and proud, a singing wind was in his ears. He turned the brake to the limit of his strength. It might be said that the car went no faster—that was all. He braced his boot heels against the running-board, he threw all his weight out in front, his body hanging over blank and whirling space. One notch! Another! He fumbled the pawl into the ratchet with his toe, and drew back to rest, every muscle a-tremble. The jerking ladder had wrenched his arms, their strength failed. Again he threw his weight out above dizzy nothingness—this time with his knees bent. Slowly, he straightened the powerful toggle-joint of the knees. Another notch! Once more, this time with arms and back and knees straining together in a last desperate effort. Another notch!

The track wheeled round in the deep shadow of Horseshoe Hill. He could do no more. The car went a little slower—that was all.

It was not all! Again that singing wind made flaming music to his ears. The V Cross T would race across the neck of the horseshoe and be there before him. There would be help, in time. The east side of Horseshoe Hill was impassable. That would not stop the V cross T. *What these men started, they carried through—to the last ditch, and then some!* He did not think it—every drop of his thrilling blood knew it, and rejoiced at it, thanked God for it!

He shot from the black shadow into a flaming world. Far ahead, he saw the V Cross T pour in a living flood—the splendid, the strong-hearted—over the black lava wall, cliff and

boulder and crumbling rock-heap. (It cannot be done. But eleven men and twelve horses did it, unhurt. For Katy came.). Nate Logan saw that there would scarce be time. Once more he threw himself upon the brake—arms and legs and back and heart and soul.—Another notch!

He clung blindly to the brake wheel.—A hand was laid beside his. "Let us spell you a while, old-timer," said Tom-Dick-Bob. Emil James came behind, his face serenely meditative and casual. These two fought the brake together: the car ground to a stop. Al Clemens raced around the next little curve to slow up the Elevator.

"Here's your horse, Nate," said Milt Craig, as Logan came down the ladder. "Lost your hat? Oh, well, we don't want to go back for it. We'll borrow a sunbonnet for you at Water Cañon. Le's drag it. We don't want no chatter with these railroaders."

The Elevator clanked by, slowing up to make gentle coupling. John Sayles looked back over his shoulder and gasped.

Logan looked. From the window of the single coach—a combination baggage-mail-express-and-passenger car—a little girl leaned out and waved her hand: a woman bent above her, smiling, a hand on the child's dress.

Logan held to the saddle horn. Before him Saragossa Mountain reeled in golden mist. Low over Magdalena hill the sun broke through a wisp of wandering cloud: as if God laughed through His tears, and bent close in pardonable pride for that He had made from the sinning dust.

"Kinks!" said Nate Logan.

CHAPTER X

THE CUTTING GROUND

"The circle" gathers cattle as a drag-net gathers fish. The meshes of it are horsemen, a mile or two miles apart, according to the lay of the land. Each man is responsible for all cattle between himself and his next neighbor on either hand.

On this day the V Cross T drag had combed a little pear-shaped country with twenty-five miles as the shortest diameter. The programme was, briefly: Breakfast before day; catch horses, a brisk ride of thirty-odd miles to the pear-butt, divide and scatter, bringing all cattle to the appointed roundup ground by dinner time: dinner by sections, and change of horses: work the herd on the cutting ground through the long, hot afternoon.

In "working the herd," the horsemen, meshes of the forenoon, become a living fence: some become gates. The company men first, then each stray man in turn, goes through the herd and cuts out each his own.

John Sayles Watterson, Jr., was part of that living fence to-day. His return to the maternal arms had been postponed without date. Nor had Logan carried out his coastward plans. Instead, he had taken his family out to San Clemente and established them in Chautauqua. Logan himself was over on the Malibu, deeper yet in the wilderness: seeking, report said, a practicable path for a railroad to the headwaters of the Gila, to tap the vast parallelogram of hinterland which lies athwart the Arizona-New Mexico border.

Since noon the never-ceasing feet had trampled the roundup ground to powder. The spring southwesters were blowing. The roundup was an impenetrable dust-cloud, from whose whirling center came rolling mutter and steady uproar—the complaint of a thousand protesting cattle.

Riders, dim-flitting, circled the herd; now seen, now blotted out; perhaps the cloud, thinning for brief space, gave a glimpse of bewildered eyes and crowding horns, white-flashing; to be swallowed up again in swirling tumult. From time to time there appeared on the cloud-edge a slow-moving cluster of cattle from which a steer darted like four-footed lightning; lapped with him, nose to tail, a cutting horse in eager escort. They zigzagged in swift, unexpected angles like a water-skipper gleaming to and fro over a sunny pool. Flashing, turning, as the steer tried to dodge back, the vigilant cow-pony headed him off; still grumbling and garrulous, the steer hoisted his tail in token of defeat and made for the cut.

After cutting out the steers, the company calves were thrown into a separate cut and branded, then the stray calves cut out and branded; last, stray cattle were cut out, and finally all cuts thrown together and left in charge of a half dozen unlucky ones till the dayherd should come in. The range cattle were started off and turned loose, breaking up fan-wise across the sand ridges into the long, clamorous streaks, still running and bawling their sense of outrage to high heaven. The sun was low; already the dayherd—huge, unwieldly—was slowly tumbling over the mesa's edge toward the bed ground. Close by, the wrangler was bringing the horseherd campward.

As the dust settled, little groups of men became visible, heading for the chuck-wagon on the river bank, where in the lee of sheltering cottonwoods the cook's fire blazed brightly. Bridle on neck, the horses paced soberly, with much sneezing and shaking of wise heads; the horsemen brushing their hats, and removing the handkerchiefs tied over mouth and nose for protection from the choking dust. Last of all came the Cattle Inspector and Wildcat Thompson, deep in earnest converse.

The inspector had joined the outfit in the middle of the afternoon. The V Cross T had not seen him since the steer-shipping of the West Work at Ridgepole, three weeks before —the day of the runaway freight car and the rehabilitation of Nate Logan.

"Say, Mr. Thompson," said the inspector, "there was a dogie in the pen up to your ranch and the feller there wasn't disseminating no information whatever. He said you was the editor of the question bureau—his business was to see that

the stock got water and to blab yearlings; givin' out statistics to gratify idle curiosity weren't no part of his lay. He had all the symptoms of the malignant pip. So I thought I would come down and see you. How about it?"

"Has it got a Hook-and-Ladder brand breaking out on it somewhere, and its ears cut bias?" queried Thompson lightly. "'Cause if it ain't decorated that way, it sure ain't mine. I don't run but the one brand.—Wasn't that dusk rank? Why, along about four o'clock a man on the far side of the herd might have stubbed his toe on the Rocky Mountains unbeknownst."

The inspector flushed. "Meanin' that if it wears your brand, it's yours, come hell or high water? Now, there's no use taking that tone, Steve. I ain't mistrusting you—stealing calves ain't your style. But there's the law. I got to see you prove that the dogie's mother was yours. You know the law as well as I do."

"No man shall keep a calf under seven months' old, unless he can produce the mother on demand," quoted Steve soberly. "Or, should the said cow have the misfortune to be dead, he must have the last will and testament of the deceased, signed by two disinterested witnesses, settin' forth, in the name of God, Amen!—bein' of sound mind but failin' health, owin' to havin' been struck by lightnin', or eaten by bears, as the case might be, that she does hereby make, ordain, publish and declare these presents, to whom it may concern, to-wit, namely: That she, the aforesaid cow, being owned by her owner, subject to first mortgage held by Citizen's Bank of Tucumcari, does hereby give, will, bequeath and devise to said owner, his heirs, executors and assigns forever, all her right, title and interest in the following named property, to-wit: The undivided four quarters of one calf, located in the South East One Fourth of the South West One Fourth of the United States, and more particularly described in schedule A, as regards age, sex, color and disposition, and that she was rightfully and legally seized of said calf? Sure thing!" He paused for breath.

"Further," he recited glibly, "any one violating the provisions of this act is liable, on conviction, to a term of eleven months in county jail or penitentiary, or a fine of five hundred dollars to one thousand dollars, or both. Oh, I know

the law from A to Albuquerque! And the calf is sold for the Sanitary Board rake-off—to pay for board meetin's and to carry elections with."

The inspector expostulated. "Oh, well now, what's the use of getting hot under the collar?" he said. "I suppose, of course, you can prove the dogie's mother was yours."

"'Prove?'" said Steve disdainfully. "'Prove'? You can prove anything—if getting two disinterested parties to swear to it, at five dollars per party, is any proof. I mind meetin' Jim Burleson in Lincoln once. Charged with stealing a span of mules, he was. 'Hello, Uncle Jim!' I sings out. 'How's your case comin' on?' 'Oh, that's all right,' he says. 'That's all right! No trouble at all. Got it all fixed up. I can prove that I bought 'em by half a dozen good men. Jest one thing I am worried about: I don't know yet which span of mules it is!'"

"Now look here, Steve," said the inspector protestingly. "Of course, I don't doubt that the calf's yours. I'm your friend. But I got to do my duty——"

"Do your duty, then—who's hinderin' you?" said Steve. "But don't get mixed up none about what your duty is. You don't consider it anyways part of your duty to fine or imprison me yourself, do you? That takes a judge and jury. Nor to arrest me? That takes a sheriff and three drunk deputies to do that. That's what I elected a sheriff for—to look after such things for me. You ain't getting paid to arrest folks. You inspect—and if you see things anyways bent or curved-like, your duty is to report it. That calf isn't seven months old—its mother is dead as Melchisdec—I'm keeping it up, and raising it on my old milk cow; I won't produce no witnesses to prove that its mother ever was mine. Why, if everybody had to prove they wasn't ownin' other folks' property, a title-deed wouldn't be no more good than a rain check in hell! Now go ahead and report—but don't you touch that calf!"

"You'll get yourself in trouble, Steve," warned the inspector. "What's the use of being stubborn? You don't want to defy the law. A good citizen ought to uphold it."

"Don," said Steve, more seriously, "a man that keeps a foolish law is only a fool—but a man who doesn't break a

wicked law is knave and coward, all both, and fool besides. Your law is foolish: the open range don't average one man to every ten miles square. But cows die dead, whether you've got witnesses or not. It's hardly exaggeratin' to say they all die, sooner or later—cows do. Leastways, I never seen none that didn't die once—sometime in their lives. And the rains don't begin till July; the calf harvest comes before that when the grass is shortest and driest; right then is when most cows die; it's exactly the cows with calves that have the best chance to die. You lose your cow by act of God, your calf by act of Legislature. You got no right to save the calf—unless you keep two disinterested witnesses under pay ridin' with you all the time.

"It's a wicked law. The Rio Grande is in flood, calving time; when it goes down, it leaves great stretches of mud and quicksand; the lakes are dryin' up; hundreds of cows bog down and die every day, leaving bright-eyed, pink-nosed calves makin' anxious and pointed inquiries concernin' breakfast. 'Tain't no difference whose they *was*. When a man finds one he's either got to take it home across his saddle for the kids to raise, or else shoot it. He can't leave the poor little trick to starve—a man can't—law or no law."

"Yes, but there's lots of thievin' goin' on," the inspector interposed. "Cuttin' young calves off from their mammies."

"Prove it, then—prove it and punish 'em," said Steve. "No self-respectin' cow-thief 'ud do a thing like that. The union 'ud take away their cards too quick. Such dirt ain't man-size. If you prove it on me, give me all the law calls for, and take my tobacco. But don't try it without proof. I'll secede.

"This law proposes to put the burden of proof on the stoop-shouldered white man—make him prove he is innocent. Man wouldn't mind doin' that if was guilty, but when he ain't, it annoys him. Talk about it's bein' unconstitutional—why, it's plumb unhygienic! It's contrary to bedrock principles of common law—and common sense, too, which is a damn sight more important. I got nothin' against you, Don; but when you send in your report, you give the Insanitary Board my best respects and tell 'em Wildcat Thompson says they can go plumb slap-dab to hell: that I keep this calf; that they can't

find twelve men in the Territory that'll cinch me for not lettin' it starve, and if they fool with me one little bit I'll fix 'em so their own dogs'll bark at 'em! Why, if they ever try to enforce such a pipe-dream as that, I'll rip that board up into toothpicks! I'll plow Santa Fé up and sow it with salt; tourists in little black caps 'll be gettin' off the Pullmans and inquirin' where the capital used to be!"

"Spare the women and children," implored the inspector. "'If, peradventure, there be any good men.'"

Wildcat grinned. "Shucks! No harm done as far as you and me are concerned. I got to catch my night-horse."

The inspector spat thoughtfully as he unsaddled and turned his mount in the bunch. "Now," he soliloquized, "there is one man you could fall down and worship without sin—for there's nothing like him in heaven above or earth below or the waters under the earth. Of all the unruly, consarned, contrary critters!" Then a smile broke over his face. "I'm sure sorry for the Board!" he said.

By the fire the busy cook hustled along the grub-pile. The "Bobtail" guard had saddled their night horses and were off at a gallop to relieve the day herders and to bring the herd to the bed ground; to hold them there till the First Guard could eat supper and take the herd. The men who had started off the range cattle were riding back slowly; the low sun made their shadows long and thin behind them; the wind died with the dying day. The night-wrangler and the First Guard had already caught and tied their horses and were eating "First Table." The Autocrat permitted this out of mere humanity, so they could go on duty and let the day-wrangler and the Bobtail come in to supper.

The inspector, deep in thought, watched the roping out of night horses. "Now Steve never stole that calf one single time," he pondered. "Some girl must have turned him down good and plenty for him to be cravin' to lock horns with the Cattle Sanitary Board just for the sake of entertainment and exercise. Myself, I wouldn't choose that form of excitement any. That's what I call goin' some. Now, if an irresistible force should have a head-end collision with an immovable body? Answer: There'd be somethin' doin'. I would sure like to behold that same—somewhat aloof, through a telescope."

CHAPTER XI

THE NIGHT GUARD

Two by two, the eight men of the Third Guard jogged melodiously around the herd. Emil James and Tom-Dick-Bob were paired off: old man Gibson and Milt Craig; "Dallas" McCombs and Neighbor Jones, representing the country east of the river; with John Sayles and Wildcat Thompson for the last couple.

The cattle were quiet now, and for the most part asleep. From before or behind, slow chanted, monotonous, interminable songs of doubtful propriety floated to John Sayles; or at times a cigarette, dim glowing through the dark, told of his Comrades-on-Guard.

Steve told John Sayles of his talk with the inspector. "They don't mean no harm, the Board don't," he said magnanimously. "Good old grannies. Why, they mean their fussy old laws to do good every time—to put down stealin' and dirt. The Legislature? Oh, it does just as it's bid, like a good child—if nobody don't bid higher. The Sanitary Board deals and the Legislature passes. The trouble is, the Board appoints themselves, spontaneous, like a wart on a thumb; they ain't accountable to nobody, and they see only one side, as the dinner pail said to the tramp. Their side. So the butchers' law, the strays-sale law, every law bearin' on the cow business has just one effect: Head you off every time. They work unnecessary hardship on the small cow-man till he has to work like a steam sausage-grinder to make both ends meet.

"Take the maverick law, f'rinstance. The cattle business is curious. How frequent I have explained patiently to pin-headed and inquirin' tenderfeet, that cattle don't grow in rows, like cabbages, and can't be picked just when they're ripe, like apples. They've got four legs apiece, and move from place

to place. Lots of times, in the mountains and *bosques*, they get so wild they won't hardly lick salt out of your hand. So they raise calves that grow up unbranded. After they quit their mammies, these mavericks belong to the Sanitary Board. *The law says so.*

"That is to say, all your unbranded stuff that's swift enough to outrun you belong to some one else. Every long-ear that got cut off from his mammy to-day, and was lucky enough to make a get-away, belonged to the Board the minute they hit the brush. *The law says so.* All sleepers go to the Board. Keeping the kitty for the whole dum Territory makes a good big rake-off, and no light or license to pay for. Some day they'll enact that all ring-streaked and speckled ones belong to the Board, I guess. But it's no matter—they don't represent. It's only a theory.

"In practice, if a bunch of us start up a maverick, the man swingin' the fastest loop puts his mark on, the rest of us setting on the yearlin's head, while the lucky one brands it. Of course, as a matter of courtesy, the man ownin' the range has the preference—if he catches the critter first.

"And that's all right, all right. But human nature is mighty similar. From branding a sure-enough maverick to getting a calf that has ambitions to be one as soon as his mammy weans him, is a mighty short step, if you're alone at the time. A bunch of you see a long-ear ten months old, take after him and waste him. Seems like a short yearlin' is the hardest thing there is to put your rope on in the brush. But the next day any one of the bunch sees the same calf, rising fifteen months old now, and he doesn't get away none whatever. Nor his mammy ain't with him either, along toward the last.

"Right there is where complications ensue most astonishin'. If a yearlin' is caught wearin' a big company's brand, and suckin' a poor man's cow, they throw it down and burn a big stripe slaunch-wise, for a mistake-brand, giving the poor man an unmarked one to pay for it. For the company's brand is sacred and mustn't be barred out. *But*, when they find a calf wearin' a little man's brand followin' a company cow, look-see! The play is to put the stripes on the man. That's different. It's no 'mistake' now, just 'mis-took'—short for stole. It don't take much education to see that ain't hardly a

square deal. So we don't sometimes most always run our horses plumb down to tell the sheriff the turr'ble sights we've seen, out of town. Not always.

"Havin' in mind these little discrepancies and mebbe-so a few more, we sorter overlook the law. Take the yearlings that got away to-day. They might have been the Company's, or yours, or mine, or Sum's, or anybody's. You can't tell now, unless they get with their mammies again. And they won't, if their mammies belonged to us little stray fellers—for all stray cows are taken along in the herd. There's only one thing dead sure about it. They do *not* belong to the Santa Fé Railroad nor the Sanitary Board, nor yet to the Smithsonian Institute. 'Cause why? They ain't none of 'em got no cattle running here, nor nobody running 'em. So whoever gets his twine on them mavericks, their his'n, and no questions asked. It's got to be that-a-way. Human nature won't stand for no laws confiscatin' right and left for nice old gentlemen livin' in town, with bay windows on 'em so big they can't tie their own shoes. They'd orter buy some cows, and look after 'em, if they want any mavericks from this range."

A browsing steer threw up his head, snuffed uneasily, and made a dash for liberty. The conversationalists hurled through the starlight and rounded him back after a brisk chase. As they resumed their circle, they were close behind the next couple; a voice reached them, singing gaily to the tune of Boom-de-A:

> *"'Way down on the Yank-te-plank*
> *Bull-frog jumped from bank to bank!*
> *Tore himself from flank to flank,*
> *Bruised himself from shank to shank!"*

"Steve," said John Sayles, as they fell back to their proper interval, "aren't you afraid they'll make you trouble? You want to remember that bull-frog. Don't be too ambitious."

"They won't arrest *me*," said Steve confidently. They dassent risk their little old scare-crow law on man that'll go the route and make a test case of it. It might terrify people with a guilty conscience and bad digestion—'the wicked flee, whom no man pursueth'—'but it won't scare nobody above an insec'.

I'm like the feller was about religion—I'm open to conviction, all right, but I'd like to see any one convict me. Trouble, though? I shouldn't wonder. My cattle's mortgaged to DeForest—and when the DeForest has chilblains, the Sanitary Board rubs iodine on their feet. Then there's two years' back taxes due. The Board is all peanut politicians, and them and their other friends and stand in with themselves right well. Guess there'll be some few sparks flyin' upwards, all right."

"Can't you prove ownership of that dogie?"

"That calf? Sure. His mammy got crowded off a bluff and broke her back. Time we gathered a car of butcher-stuff last winter. The whole outfit seen it."

"Wouldn't it have been wiser——" John Sayles hesitated. Steve took it up.

"Wouldn't it be wise of a man to stand still while someone wrapped cobwebs around him? Cobwebs 'ud hold him—if he stood still long enough. But if he stretched out his arm?"

"What'll you do then?"

"O, I'll do like the fly did——

"'A fly and a flea in a flue,
Were imprisoned, so what could they do?
Said the flea, "Let us fly."
Said the fly, "Let us flee."
So they flew through a flaw in the flue!'"

"I'll use a little diplomacy and crawl through a flaw somewheres. Here comes the Last Guard. Now for one small short nap."

CHAPTER XII

BELL-THE-CAT

THE river-work was done, the steers had been shipped at Albuquerque: the wagon was loitering home with what Malibu Flat and V Cross T Cattle had been picked up along the river: taking the long lane route west of Thief Mountain, to avoid the farm-and-wire-fence country along the Rio Grande. Once back on the home range, the *rodeo* would break up: no more work until next fall, August or September, according to the rains.

John Sayles meant to go back to the N 8 ranch; Emil had said nothing of any new venture in pursuit of happiness: and Steve Thompson had already left the wagon. Steve went to his ranch first: then to Saragossa, the county seat, to adjust some business matters.

"Mornin'," said Steve to the Tax Collector.

The official acknowledged the greeting coldly from his seat at the desk.

"Thought I'd come over and settle up," said Steve pleasantly. "Say, you fellows got me payin' on more cattle than some of my neighbors that sell fifty steers to my ten, and vote the right ticket. However, I ain't beefin' about past favors, but this year—Lordy! Why I've always heard that the quickest way to improve the breed of cattle was to cross an old Chihuahua cow with a freight train, but the way they socked it onto me this year you'd think my herd was all imported from Scotland overnight."

"I have nothing to do with that. Talk to the assessor. It's none of my business," replied the Collector, with chill official dignity.

"Yes, that's right, too—but it'll be your business when you

come to collect this year's taxes. But, shucks! What's the use of borrowin' trouble? Lots of water will run under the bridge before they become due—to say nothin' of bein' paid."

The Collector looked up from his desk. "Your taxes with penalty amount to one hundred and eighty-seven dollars and thirty-six cents," he said, in condemnatory tones. "I have written to you several times, Mr. Thompson."

Steve laughed pleasantly. "You know what the Irish butcher told the doctor? 'Waal, Waal! For-rty dollars fir midicine and for-rty dollars fir bafe! Isn't it odd?' Would you mind if I take one of my chairs? I'm tired standing." He sat down without waiting for an answer.

"Your chairs?" Neither glance nor tone was polite. The Collector thoroughly disapproved of Thompson's existence, and being in his own yard, took pains not to conceal it.

"Well I guess mebbe I didn't state that just right," admitted Steve handsomely. "Ought to have said 'our' chairs, seein' as you're a citizen too." He unrolled a bundle and counted. "Here's seven mountain lion scalps, and one bear scalp, at twenty dollars each. Gimme a receipt and I pay you the seven thirty-six difference." He counted out the money and waited expectantly.

The Collector frowned heavily.

"We don't do business that way—hardly. You plank over the cash."

"O—and then you hand it back again for my scalps? I see!" said Steve innocently. "If you want to be the party of the first part, why not? It's only a little vanity—not worth quarreling over."

"You pay over that money," demanded the Collector, flushed and angry. "The Commissioners 'll give you scrip for your scalps. There's no money in the treasury to pay bounties with. All we have it set apart for other purposes."

"Both in the same boat, by George!" Steve's tones were dulcet and sympathetic. "No money in my treasury either—not to pay taxes with. What money I have is set apart for the purpose of settin' together at a little game down to Joe's place. That what you keepin' yours for?"

This bit deep. The Collector was a known devotee of the national game. He was furious, but reticent about expressing his emotions. The bruit ran of Wildcat Thompson that

he turned not back from any plow whereunto he set his hand. "Fight a buzz-saw and it a-goin'," said the countryside. Moreover, the Collector feared the puncher's rasping tongue. So he swallowed his wrath. "We pay you in scrip, Mr. Thompson, having no money——"

"But if I pay you one hundred and eighty dollars, you'll have money, don't you see?" Steve insisted. "Then you can pay me for my scalps and we'll take one drink on me and one on the county."

The exasperated official chewed his mouth. "No, no—you don't understand," he said, wiping his clammy brow. "This money doesn't go into the bounty fund. There's a special tax for that. We give you scrip—the county's promise to pay—and you either wait till we have the money or you sell the scrip for what you can get for it."

"O, if you put it *that* way," said Steve, generously. "Nobody wants to jump on a county when it's down. Give me your little old scrip."

"The Commissioners give you the scrip," explained the Collector indulgently—inwardly congratulating himself on having brought this difficult person to see reason. "My part is to receive taxes from you, for instance."

"I'll just give you scrip," said Steve.

"You'll *what?*" The last word was screeched.

"Give you scrip. You can keep it till I have money not set aside for other purposes—or you can sell it for what you can get for it!"

Speechless, the Collector glared at this persistent and impracticable taxpayers. He made more motions with his mouth; but no more words came.

"Wait!" he squealed at last. "Wait till I get back!"

He reappeared shortly, followed by Commissioners, Assessors, Treasurer, County Clerk, District Attorney, some assorted politicians, and Santiago Padilla, sheriff. Low-browed was the sheriff, with a heavy brutal face—a "Killer" with a record. They filed in awkwardly, each waiting for someone to begin. Steve kept his chair.

"Take a seat," he said sweetly, with a patronizing wave of hand and cigarette.

It was "Johnny-the-Slick," smooth of phrase, who spoke up: Chairman of the Commissioners, also member of the

Sanitary Board, and, through Survival of the Slickest, Facile Princeps, or Easy Boss of the territory. He was singularly unlike Steve's word picture of the "fussy old grannies" of the Sanitary Board; an upstanding, broad-shouldered, muscular man of forty, with a shrewd face and keen though furtive eyes, and with the square chin said by its possessors to indicate determination. A born wire-puller, of cool temper and plausible tongue, a reader of motives, a generous divider, and —to give everybody his due—unquestionably a good friend to his friends, The Boss was a natural leader of any body of men—that could not go without a leader. So far, he had never met defeat or check: so his admirers boasted. He was a perfect specimen of mental and physical manhood, except for mere details. He was over-cautious, for instance, lacking the bump of indiscretion; forgetful of undesirable circumstances, absent minded, and easily confused about portable property. Save for these trifling faults, his equipment was admirable.

He spoke oracularly.

"Now, Mr. Thompson, we surely can settle this little misunderstanding without any difficulty. You *must* obey the law."

"*Must* is a big little word," observed Steve dryly. "The county owes me one hundred and eighty dollars. I owe as much to the county, and a little more. One debt cancels the other. I hereby offer the difference, seven dollars and thirty-six cents in cash. A receipt, please, or it's all off with the big Swede."

"I can make that perfectly clear to you, Mr. Thompson," said the Easy Boss persuasively. "A special tax of six mills on the dollar is levied on stockmen only, over and above the ordinary tax, and from the proceeds of this all the bounties are paid. The fund is now exhausted, and we are not allowed to use the other money. We must pay scrip."

"Very pretty," said Steve. "As it happens, I've seen the scrip you issue. The law is printed on the back of it. No bounty is to be paid to men owing back taxes. Likewise, I pay no taxes to counties owing me back bounty. I hereby unanimously repeal your laws and offer you a perfectly just settlement, man to county, without no law. If I owe you a dollar and you owe me a dollar, we're square. If I owe

you one hundred and eighty dollars, and you owe me one hundred and eighty dollars, we're square. Not a hundred and eighty times as square—just square."

The Easy Boss lost his patience. He was not used to being thus lightly entreated. For six years he had "carried New Mexico in his vest pocket" without inconvenience to either. He was not one to be set at naught by a penniless puncher.

"You *got* to pay!" he sputtered. "There's a way to *make* you pay. The sheriff——"

"You are singularly careless in your choice of words," said Steve, correcting him. "*Make* me pay? *Make? ME?* Why, Mr. Chairman, you can't *make* me do anything! There is only one thing any man has to do. That is, to die. He has the casting vote on every other proposition under the sun. Think it over—see if I'm not right. What you probably mean to say is that the sheriff can levy on my property and sell it for taxes. He *might* do that."

"He'll do that—he'll start to-day!" bellowed the Easy Boss, thus defied. "Padilla!"

Padilla stepped forward—and the county administration thoughtfully side-stepped, convenient to the windows.

But Steve made no move. He seemed alarmed. "I mortgaged my cattle a while back," he ventured timidly.

"That's so—I'd forgotten. To DeForest. He'll foreclose on you now. Sheriff, you'll have to collect from DeForest."

"I—I don't think DeForest will like that," observed Steve doubtfully. "I paid him off last week. I don't think he'll pay the taxes—but he may if he wants to."

"Sheriff," said the indignant and vindicative boss. "You will get the necessary papers and attach this man's cattle at once."

Steve snuggled back in his chair with shrewdly twinkling eyes.

"Really," he said, indolently. "It would serve you right to let you send the Sheriff out to my place. But I don't hold no malice, so I'll explain. It's some complicated. Like a feller in Kay See that wanted to go to Sedalia. Ticket cost three simoleons and he didn't have but a two-spot. So he went to a pawnshop and soaked his two-dollar bill for a dollar and a half. Then he sold the pawn ticket for another dollar and a half and hit the train."

The Collector's jaw dropped; the First Citizen, with puckered forehead, rolled his underlip between thumb and finger. "Now where on earth did that other dollar come from?" he said, in a perplexed aside, to the District Attorney.

"You'd better watch the safe," returned that official darkly; and began a suspicious count of his fingers.

"My problem in high finance works just like that only different, backwards, inside out, and both ends in the middle," explained Steve. "You see, I sold my cattle to a stranger-man, and he shipped 'em from La Joya. They're in Dakota or Idaho or I dunno, now."

"We'll get the money," snarled the Boss.

"Well," said Steve, mildly, "mebbe you will. But I have my doubts. I paid DeForest off and bought a half interest in the Tanner cattle with the subtrahend. I held out just even money enough to pay out all my outstandin' indebtedness, and a little over for diet."

"We'll levy on the Tanner stock," shouted the Boss furiously.

Steve shook his head with a thoughtful smile.

"Why-y, no—I don't think you'll do that," he demurred blandly. "Tanner came in from the Malibu last week and paid all taxes due on the brand. He's got the receipts. The incident is closed, and I'm going to El Paso for a little *pasear.*"

The Collector nodded confirmation. The thwarted and defied Dictator glared at the passive figure in the chair. He saw his prestige melting away, and resorted to his last weapon. There was nervous expectancy in the air and the Administration shrank so close to the wall that they looked like a *bas relief* in the Hall of Fame.

"Padilla," said the flushed and irate First Citizen, his voice trembling with discretion, "this man is keeping up a dogie and refuses to account for it, defying the inspector and the Board. Arres——"

"Yait! Steady in the boat!" Mid-word the Slick One stopped, at the sharp command.

Cat-quick, Steve was on his feet; his right hand was in his coat-pocket. He stood up to the man of many dignities. There was a slight clicking sound in the pocket. The Boss

noted in this pocket a Shape under the cloth, which held coat and pocket cocked up at a noticeable angle; so that the end of this obscure Shape pointed fixedly at the second button of the Commissionarial vest—the very vest in which New Mexico had reposed so long. On this Shape the Boss fixed his eyes, fascinated, as if he were trying to hypnotize himself; the color faded from his cheeks.

"You will sit down, Sheriff. No contributory negligence, if you please!" said Steve quietly, without glancing his way or moving a muscle. "And the rest of you do like Asher did—abide in your breeches."

It was the decisive moment—and Steve had used well-timed diplomacy after all. For Sheriff Padilla was not without a certain low form of courage—rather, an insensate lack of fear. Had the coat pocket been turned his way he would have accepted the challenge without hesitation. As it was, he obeyed, bewildered. His slow mind was not equal to the problem, and he had no instructions.

"I have applied the Referendum to your laws. As you see, I have the Initiative on you also," said Steve cheerfully. "And now I must ask you to make me out a receipt in full for my taxes. Like the man in the Bible, because of my opportunity you will give it to me—or else send for the absent official, who really is indispensable to such a gathering. I wonder at your lack of foresight in not bringing him at first."

Now, all the officials were there present except one—the Coroner. The allusion was not lost; the receipt was made out in hasty silence. With his left hand Steve threw the bundle of scalps on the desk.

"And now, gentlemen," he said politely, "you may not be aware of the fact, but you have in your midst, in my humble person, the Boy Orator of the Rio Grande, the only original silver-tongued siren from Cibola, the Reformer of the Rockies, the Patriot of the Prairies, the Man behind the Muck Rake—old Vox Populi himself. I am sorely tempted to deliver my address on Agriculture, with special reference to Graft and Grafting. I refrain. I won't go into details—not now. But I've simply got to declare myself on a few purely general propositions.

"Dearly beloved! You can borrow money in the East for

less than the New Mexico tax-rate. We have the highest tax in America, four per cent. Add the special levy of six mills and you gave a grand total of nearly five cents, or one big nickel out of each and every dollar. In effect, every bit of property is borrowed, mortgaged to a few hundred office-holders and no show to ever pay it off. So the more you have the more you owe. Such a tax rate puts a premium on perjury. Your friends get off at a nominal sum, with a tip to the Assessor, who sells himself to the railroads. The rest of us have our choice—pay or perjury. If all paid alike the tax need not be over one per cent. In return you give us some fair schools—nothing else. What justice and order we have is mostly home-made, and you build us neither roads nor bridges. Most all the money goes into your pockets, either in fees or graft. You get the taxes for levyin' and collectin' 'em. The last treasurer in this county was thirty thousand dollars short in his accounts and settled for eighteen thousand. Everybody satisfied, and his bondsmen not one penny. No New Mexico bondsman has ever had to make good one red, round copper cent. Your laws would impugn the fair name of Blackwell's Island, cast doubts on the mentality of a madhouse. You bribe your way into office, and graft to pay the bribes. Our taxes and office holders hold us back more than all other causes combined. It's goin' to be stopped, short, never to go again—*now!* You've had your little brief authority, and to use the words of a good, large man, are about to subside into innocuous desuetude. You have my views, gentlemen. Good day! Come down with me J. H.," he said to the Easy Boss. "Want to see you a minute. I'll send back the seven dollars and thirty-six cents by you. I owe that to the county, fair and square, and I never chip-racked yet." He motioned through the door with that singularly rigid pocket.

"Let's go over to the shade," suggested Steve, in the hall. He led the way to a seat on the courthouse plaza, in full view of the Collector's window, from which officialdom looked down with interest.

Slowly Steve extracted his hand from the coat pocket, drawing forth—a pipe and a metal match case. Carefully turning the pocket wrong side out, he scraped from the corners

a pipeful of loose tobacco. He opened the match case with a slight clicking sound.

"I *will* be damned!" gasped the Foremost Citizen, half in a whisper, his eyes popping out of his head.

"Doubtless," said Steve placidly, applying the match behind steady, sheltering hands.

"Held up!" said the Easy Boss. *"Bluffed!*—Territory, County, Sanitary Board and old Santiago Padilla with six notches in his gun—held up by a smooth-faced kid and a bad-smelling pipe! Man, you're a world-beater! I must have you on my side."

Steve stood up; his eyes were stern, his voice playful no longer. "I'm no man's man—and I'm on *my* side every time. Your side? You have no side! You're a Boss without a party right now. You lost your *alce.* You've been admired as a smooth, successful rascal, but even folks that like rascals despise a crawfish. Tray, Blanche and Sweetheart, they nip your calves after this. The frontier won't stand for a man who needs them pink pills for pale people! You're a Belled Cat!"

That is how Steve won his third name—what he calls his Nom-de-gush—when the tale was whispered along until it came to the ears of the Chautaqua bunch. In the cow-countries he is still Wildcat Thompson, but in political and legal circles he is known as "Bell-the-Cat."

THE FOOL'S HEART

CHAPTER XIII

DOUBLE-DARE

"Van Atta! Huh!" snarled old man Gibson, quarrelsome drunk, swaying in the saddle, smiting his thigh with enormous hand. "Fine haired Philadelphy dude. Payin' lease money on his cattle on the Forest Reserve! Payin' *taxes* on every one of 'em! Hires a foreman to run his stuff, while he loafs in Albuquerque or in El Paso half the time, or tinkers around in his little old mines the other half. Jines a club in Albuquerque and another in Silver City. Builds houses for his cow-camps—lumber houses—*painted!*"

Keough hated him; loud, boastful, ribald, blasphemous, his voice suited with his huge and brutal bulk. Keough mentally contrasted this shabby, repulsive, boisterous boor with Van's well-groomed, slender figure, his alert and breezy wit, his sunny charm. He was heartily sorry that Gibson had overtaken him. However, San Clemente was in sight.

"To cap all, builds a fancy two-story house up in the Reserve, twenty miles from a neighbor. Shootin-box! Saint's Rest! Oh, hell!—Sanitary plumbin', billiard table, nigger cook, chiny dishes, private 'phone to town, hardwood floors, bath-room and *books!* Wagon load of four-eyes out every little bit to admire the mountains. Won't shoot a deer out o' season!"

Keough made no answer to this tirade; no retort occurring to him save the obvious but impracticable one of bending a gun over Gibson's head—a reasonless, pig-brained, dangerous man, best humored. He burbled on, garrulous, boastful, indecently offensive.

"Now look at *me*. Sold more'n twelve hundred steers at Ridgepole yisterday—*and* broke the *monte* bank last night *I* got money. I *always* got money. Do I go blowin' myself? Do I give up my dough for baseball teams and to build Opery houses? No Sir-ee! I got a little log cabin at the Berenda for storms, and to keep chuck in—but I sleep under a tarp on the ground, I eat beef and beans and bread and coffee, I do two men's work, and I keep my outfit humpin' the year around—barrin' a little natcherel relaxation, as now. The boys has orders to be out to the ranch soon in the mornin', drunk or sober.

"Then again—do I put my money in the bank outer morbid curiosity to see if they'll give it back? Or so's they'll give me a measly five per cent. while they're gettin' ten?" His little, covetuous eyes glittered in his bloated face. "I cashes my steer-check, quits town before I git too full, I leaves the Berenda to-morrow evenin', and I hit the trail. I'll have my wad loaned out to certain parties in Hanover, drawin' my little old twelve per cent., and security so good that I sure hopes they don't pay."

Keough stole a furtive glance. "Aren't you taking a big risk to carry so much money with you?"

Gibson showed his yellow fangs in an ugly laugh. "I got my guns. Mighty few wants to tackle old Elmer. Besides, who knows? Just you—and you ain't got the nerve. I give you lief to try it. Double-dare you!" He snorted contemptuously. "The bank don't know but what I loan it out right here in town, like I done last year. Nobody else knows but what I lef' it in the bank. Just you and me—and you're too chicken-hearted! You'd like to, but you dasn't. You're chalk-white now. Thinkin' about it, be ye? Too chicken-hearted! *Yah!*"

Keough's eyes fell to hide their hate—and fear. To hide, perhaps, some sudden ominous thought. His nose twitched and dented with his effort to control his uneven breath. In the dents the white and red came by turns.

"Not that you're any better'n I be. If you had the nerve you'd be wuss. You're slick and sleek and smooth, and if it wan't for them black eyebrows grown together clean across your face, and that dinted nose where the devil grabbed you,

you'd be a good looker. You won't get drunk nor gamble, you herd with the swell bunch, and all that. But it ain't that you want to be white. *I* know ye. You just want to be thought white!"

Keough winced. The thick eyebrows showed sinister against his bloodless face, a disfiguring brand: the nose dented as with the visible finger-prints of a fiend.

Moody and sullen, Keough went to his room and flung himself on his bed. His affairs were in a bad way. His Telephone Exchange yielded fair returns, only to be lost in disasterous ventures. He had dipped heavily in town property. at Hillsboro, a hundred miles to the south. But the spur of railroad from Deming, because of which he had thought to profit, had built no further than Lake Valley, and Hillsboro values had steadily declined. Eaten by envy, ambition, intense longing for ease and luxury, he was not willing to wait the slow upbuilding of safe business. The hills were richly, though erratically, strewn with mineral. He tried placer mining, to lose heavily; while Gibson, a gunshot away, reaped golden harvests.

Last, after long observation of production, he sacrificed his Hillsboro holdings to acquire a half interest in the Golden Fleece mine—Van Atta buying the other half. For a few months their shipments made a handsome showing. Then the pay streak dwindled. It did not pay expenses again. Keough's telephone profits were swallowed regularly; all he could rake and scrape beside. Still the deficit grew. Finally Van Atta had loaned him five thousand dollars, and put in a like amount as his own share for a last attempt to recover their losings. The recent disaster in the mine had gone far to wipe out this money. Ruin stared Keough in the face.

Why? he questioned bitterly, in a dull glow of murderous rage. Why should he, of good family, good habits, education, brains, always lose? Gibson—drunkard, gambler, bully, ignorant, stupid, coarse in every fibre and instinct—Gibson, by some devil's luck, prospered in whatever he touched. . . . Keough hated himself, he hated this insolent Midas-monster who tempted him, scorned him, heaped him with insults.

He thought of the money Gibson would draw, of the lonely ranch at the Berenda. If it could be done! What was the

life of such a loathsome beast to him? . . . He pictured it out. Not a hold-up. Gibson's surly courage and sinister quickness were too well known. Death! . . . In a dozen ways, in a dozen places, he waylaid him, shot him down, set his heel on the brutal, sneering face. *"Chicken-hearted, am I?"* . . . Other visions came thronging thick and fast, horrible, appalling. He was seen, pursued, overtaken. Or, escaping, unseen, rumor, suspicion, the falling away of his fellows—arrest, questioning, the piling up of damning evidence, conviction—confession, the scaffold! . . . The beaded sweat stood out on his brow. *Too risky!*

"Hello, Central! Am Mistah Keough dere?"

"Not in town."

"Land's sake! When's he comin' back?"

"I'll give you the office. Miss Clayton'll know."

"Yas'm. Please'm . . . "Hello! Am dis Miss Clayton? Please, am yer' spectin' Mistah Waltah back sho'tly?"

"Yes. Who is it?"

"Me? Ise de cook up heah at Mistah Van's place, de Saint's Res'. You tell Mistah Waltah ole Snowball was axin for him. Tell him—tell him when is he gwinter come up heah? 'Cause if he's comin' up dis ebenin' I'd suah lak to get ter go ovah to Gallinas Haid. The Mexicans gwine ter have a big *baile* there. He was 'lowin' to be up heah to-morrow anyhow, and Mistah Van he was comin' ovah from de mine. Tell him if he's comin' now kin I start f'om heah 'bout sundown? Cain't leab dis place alone ve'y long."

"All right. I'll ask him, when he comes, and let you know."

Keough slammed the door between the exchange and his private office. "Any mail?" he snapped.

Clara Clayton, his book-keeper and chief of the hello-girls, handed him the letters. "Anything wrong, Walter?" Her hand rested timidly on his arm.

He shook her off roughly. "Can't you leave me alone? No, there's nothing wrong, Walter—for if I lose my last dollar I'll always have *you* left?"

The girl bent her head to hide tears of mortification.

"Bah! I see my finish!" Keough tore the letters to strips. "Rats leave a sinking ship. Best follow their wise example, my girl."

"Walter! You are not yourself, or you could never hurt me so!"

It *was* his true self. The mask of courtesy, of manhood, of honor, slipped aside: the naked soul stood revealed in all its hideous baseness. With sneer and cruel taunt he stabbed her deep, mocked her grief with shameful savage delight.

"There's young Billy Armstrong, now—mighty attentive to you. I've kept tab on him. Why not marry *him?* Too high-minded, eh? Nonsense! What the eye sees not, the heart grieves not."

The girl rose steadily. No appeal for her own welfare, her own happiness; to help, defend, uphold him in his weakness, to serve the traitor with her loyalty.

"Walter, your troubles are killing you, crazing you! This once, if never again, be guided for your own good! This once, if never again, let me think for you!" She gave him the message Van Atta's cook had left for him. "Go up there to-night. Get away from it all. When Van Atta comes, talk it over with him. If he will take your interest in settlement—let the mine go. Then ride, hunt, rest, read, sleep—till you are yourself again. Come back and be a man, not a quitter! Begin again; patiently, bravely, undiscouraged. Defeat is not dishonor. You are young, strong, able. Build better next time. You must take a rest, Walter—you must! You are breaking down. Go to Saint's Rest, and get this settled and over with before you lose your mind with worrying. Go now—and come back the man I thought you!"

His cheek was pale, his eye was wild, his hand shook. He stood by the window, drumming the pane with nervous fingers: breathing slowly, laboriously, through pinched nostrils. The call to manhood, to honor, passed unheard, unnoted.—*The Berenda was eighteen miles to the Northwest, at the western base of Pinetop Mountain; Saint's Rest was on the summit, thirty miles to the Northeast, both in the loneliest of countries. If he gave permission, Snowball would be gone, there would be no one at Saint's Rest. It was two o'clock now. Once beyond the forks of the Percha, there*

were countless trails. He could go to the Berenda, unseen, back, to Saint's Rest, unseen! It could be done. . . . "Too chicken-hearted?" Insolent dog! . . . There was no time to lose. Gibson, going directly, should reach the Berenda by sundown, while he must follow the cañon of the Percha as if going to Van Atta's.

"I'll do it—I'll go now. Call up the darkey and tell him I'll be there by seven. He needn't wait. I'm sorry I was such a brute, Clara. I am half crazy, I guess. You're a good little girl. Now I'll hike along, *pronto*. Give me a kiss. Good-by!"

CHAPTER XIV

CHICKEN-HEARTED

So hot and cold he was, as he rode up the valley of the Percha; so goaded and checked and torn by greed and fear and hate; so sick and shaken by tumult of whirling senses; that, if his drawings back had been due to any promptings of mercy, if there had been one fickle impulse, however fleeting, to spare the wretched creature whose doom he planned, he might almost have been pitied.

But, his hesitation was for himself alone. There was no shrinking from the bloody deed itself; only fear of mishap, detection. He had no more compassion for Gibson than for a worm he might crush.

Men there have been, most wicked, most shame-stained, yet with some wild touch of generosity, of loyalty, of unshrinking courage, that, despite their crimes, has won them grudging admiration; yes, even love and tears. Never, where the final blight of utter selfishness has fallen.

Keough would and would not. The thing was impossible; it was foolishly simple: Gibson should die, Gibson might live to dotage for all his meddling. Even if he were unseen, his horse would be sweaty, guant, travel-worn. Questioned, how would he account for that? The chills ran down his spine. *Too risky!* He came to the Forks, he passed by the fatal trail to Berenda. What was it Clara had said? To begin over again—A bitter pill!—But perhaps that was best.—He heard the patter of hoof-beats, he looked up. Johnny Cox came riding down the Burley trail: and Johnny Cox rode his pet horse. . . . The quick fiend whispered counsel; the white dents came and went with the fierce beating of Keough's heart.

"Hello, John! How's Burley?"

"Dead. Which way?"

"Van Atta's. Hunt, rest up, general good time. Come along?"

"Can't. Goin' down to San Clemente to shape my horse for a race."

The black brows raised scoffingly.

"That old cow? He's so fat he can hardly waddle. This one I'm riding can beat him half a mile, right here and now."

"What color is your money," inquired Johnny, lightly.

"O, I mean business," said Keough. "Wait till I get this load of clothes off my saddle." He untied the bundle wrapped in his slicker—(which contained, not clothes, but a lineman's test-set, for use in construction or repair work, pliers, a pair of high-heeled boots, such as cowboys wear, and a tightly covered can). "We can take a lap-and-tap start from that big dead juniper. Here's the judge and stakeholder." He emptied a tobacco pouch and dropped in two gold pieces. "Put in your money and hang it on that bush. The first man that gets to it, keeps it."

"You're on!" said John. "But it's a shame to take it."

A little later, Johnny Cox, many yards in the lead, grabbed the pouch, flourished it derisively, and passed on his way in a cloud of dust.

Keough was out twenty dollars—but his horse was in a lather of blameless sweat. Questioned, Johnny would bear him out: bear witness too that he had passed far beyond the Forks on his way to Saint's Rest. From here on, no one but strangers followed the winding valley road. If any one else came down—why, they had missed each other in the broken hills and ridges. He hesitated no longer. Fate was playing in his hands. Taking up his bundle, he turned leftward through the brush: towards the Berenda trail.

At sunset he was riding up the winding pebbly bottom of the dry Berenda, that he might leave no sign. Hiding the horse in a clump of black willow, he removed his shoes and pulled on the boots he carried in his bundle: stepping from stone to stone till he reached the wagon-road from Whitewater. The house was now nearby. He walked up boldly and shouted. No answer. Had there been anyone there,

had he met anyone before, he had a tale ready of cow-thieves seen, warning to give. He crouched behind a box near the door. He must not shoot Gibson in the body; he might spoil the bills. It seemed ages to Keough, waiting in the deepening dusk; but it was not really long. Bellowing a maudlin song, Gibson rode up, unsaddled, led his horse to the pasture and slapped his neck; not unkindly.

"Get fat, you old sun-of-a-gun! You've had a purty hard lay. One month off for you. Pull your freight! G' long, y' old fool! I aint got no corn for ye."

Turning the corner, Keough's gun was almost at Gibson's ear. He fired twice. Unflinching, he completed his fearful errand. Unflinching, he dragged the body to the back of the house.

"Chicken-hearted, am I? Damn you!"

The ten miles back to the Percha were made in an hour; the boots hidden by the way. He crossed the wagon-road, toiled up the rough black mesa beyond, came at last to the Saint's Rest telephone line, where it steepled-jacked the shortest way across the hills. He climbed the pole and bridged the test set to the wire.

"Hello, Central !. . . That you, Clara? . . . Well, I got here. . . . No, just come. . . . Yes, I rode slow. Clara, you'll find a letter in my desk from John Murray, at Deming. Wants work at the mine. Forgot to answer it, and he's an old friend. Wish you'd write him. Tell him he'd better not come. Like as not, we'll shut down in a few weeks. Clara, don't call me up any more to-night for anything. I'm dead beat and going right to bed. Good-night, little girl. . . . Yes. Good-night!"

He took off the test set and climbed up the scarred and shaly hillside to a ragged and shattered cliff. Here he hid it.

Behind a boulder he kindled a tiny fire. He looked at his watch. Nearly eight. Then, for the first time, he counted Gibson's money. . . . Seventeen thousand dollars—nine hundred steers at fifteen dollars, plus the winnings at *monte*. More than Keough had expected. Dropping the pocket book in the fire, he put the money in the can, and thrust it deep into a crevice; carefully marking the spot.

His skirts were clear now. He was on record as having telephoned from Saint's Rest at eight o'clock. He rode swiftly up the line. But one risk remained—of vague suspicion only—if any one should happen into Saint's Rest before him. He had a story ready. His horse, falling, had got away, had tried to go back to town, long declining to be caught. Besides, why should anyone suspect him?

He felt neither terror nor remorse. He was all right now —safe, self-possessed, rich, happy. What years of striving, industry, self-denial had failed to do, a bold stroke had won in an hour. He urged his horse on through the night.

CHAPTER XV

A KNOCKING AT THE GATE

Coming on such a house, in such a place, unexpectedly, Tait was startled to wakefulness. It loomed above him in the clear starlight, quiet and still.

Under the broad portico the shadows were deep. Knocking smartly, he struck his knuckles on the bronze bell-pull. Groping, his fingers closed around it.

"Oh, hell!" he said, scornfully. "And I plumb forgot to bring my cyard-case. Here goes!"

Mellow and sonorous came the answered peal, long-echoing, rippling to silence. He rang again, more vigorously. He led his horse to the open stable, not unsaddling, and threw him some hay. He returned with the deliberate intention of breaking in; partly that he was honestly hungry, more that he was hungrily dishonest. His predatory nose scented rich pickings.

Long since, Tait had learned that locked and bolted doors are no indication of a house securely closed. This was no exception. The third window yielded without resistance. He found himself in the kitchen.

Once inside, his prowling instincts mastered his hunger. Lighting a lamp, with a perfunctory clutch at the good things in the pantry, he began a tour of inspection, munching by the way.

Passing through at the dining room, he stood in a great central hall, evidently at once library, smoking room and living place in general. Seven doors gave in to it; the outer door in front, one in the rear, the door to the dining room by which he had just entered, one beyond the fireplace, and three in the further side. Of these, the two next the front were hung with rich Oriental portiéres of dark red. A heavy

rug matching these hanging in color took up the central space, eked out at either end by thick and gorgeous Navajo blankets, which Tait viewed with proprietary interest.

On his right was a tiled fireplace, flanked by low, oaken bookshelves. Two broad tables, littered with periodicals, ash-trays, pipes, matches and such small comforts, were overhung by a four-light chandelier, and surrounded by a miscellany of rockers and various lounging-chairs. All these, the college and fraternity emblems, prints, etchings, the steins on the mantel, the crossed rapiers and buck's head above, Tait viewed with contemptuous dissatisfaction.

He raised his lamp. Facing him, a loitering flight of steps made short and easy way to a wide, low landing in the corner; turning, as a hanging stairway, took on the dignity of carven balustrade, rose in leisurely slope athwart the entire back of the hall to a second landing, paused for breath, turned leftward again with a last resolute and stately scramble, and gained the second story directly over Tait's head.

Under this stairway was a single door. Tait peered in. It was a well-appointed bath-room. Drawing back, he threw an ironic glance at the staircase. "Humph!" he grunted. "Wonder they don't have an elevator."

Retracing his steps, he passed the fire-place with a sneer for the divan's luxurious cushions, the ribboned mandolin dropped from a careless hand; opened the remaining door on the fire-place side; into a billiard room, floor and walls adorned with trophies of the chase. There was a gun rack, too, of which Tait made note for future reference.

Crossing the hall, he pushed aside the curtains. Bedrooms both; in each a silver candlestick met his approval. Also, he would here replenish his wardrobe later. The last room on the ground floor, at the stair-foot, was fitted out as an office, with a telephone, a small safe, a desk, beyond, a shelf of bulky account books.

Tait moistened his lips. His eyes glistened. His cupidity was now thoroughly aroused. If the safe was furnished to harmonize with the house—if he could open it! But how? He was a man of varied industry, but this was beyond him. He rummaged the desk hastily. Nothing of value save a jewelled

stiletto, evidently used to open letters. He thrust it in his pocket. If he could only open that safe!

Hark!

He blew out the light. Some one galloped up the road; dismounted, ran up the steps; a key turned in the front door! Tait cursed himself viciously. If he had been quicker—if he had only been found in the kitchen! The New Mexican regards leniently the informalities prompted by hunger. But in the office? Tait drew his gun.

"You, Sambo! Hey! Hello-o!" called a clear and joyous voice. Jingle of spurred heels came down the hall. "Why, where is that damn lazy darkey? If he's gone, I'll fire him as sure as my name's Jim Van Atta!"

A match crackled: a finger of light pierced the keyhole to Tait. The footsteps came nearer. Tait cocked his gun. But wait! Why should this Van Atta come straight to the office, first of all? Why indeed, except that he had money or valuables to put in the safe? Let him once open that!—Tait crouched down between desk and wall, under the shelf.

Van Atta placed his lamp on the safe and took down the receiver. His back was to Tait. The light showed his good-humored, clean-cut profile, the boyish smile.

"Hello, Central! . . . Is Walter there? . . . Yes. . . . Yes, it's me. . . . Yes, I'm at Saint's Rest. Is that you, Miss Clayton? . . . Up here? . . . You're sure Walter 'phoned from here? . . . Oh, well, he may be upstairs asleep, but I doubt it. I've just come, but I've made noise enough to wake the dead, yelling for that infernal darkey. . . . Gone to a dance? I'll dance him!"

Noiselessly, Tait let down the cocked hammer of his revolver. He slipped the gun back into his belt, and drew the stiletto. It was barely possible that a sound sleeper had not been awakened,—but a shot?

"Oh, Walter's all right, Miss Clayton. Don't be alarmed. Something may have happened that took him back to town. Maybe he's left a note. If he comes back, tell him to ask Charlie White for good news. White left the mine for San Clemente just as I started here. Well, I'll look upstairs to see if Keough's taking a Rip Van Winkle. I've got something

to wake him up. Gold! Bed tick full of gold. If I find him, or if he left any word, I'll let you know. Good-by!"

He hung up the receiver. Turning, his eye fell on the kitchen lamp and the slight disorder of his desk. He took a step forward—and Tait was upon him, stabbing and slashing. Van Atta fought back savagely and fell with no outcry. It was a matter of seconds.

Tait rose to his feet and flung away the dagger. The savage ferocity died from his face, left it haggard, horror-smitten. With light and gun he tiptoed on a hasty search upstairs. He found no one.

He came back and stared stupidly at his bloody work, clasping his head between his hands, "I wisht he was alive!" he said soberly. "I'd better 'a' served a term. Oh God, I wisht he was alive!" Wild beast as he was, he could hardly nerve himself to search his victim. In the dead man's bill-book he found a very moderate amount of money and a promissory note in Van Atta's favor for five thousand dollars, signed by Walter Keough; nothing more.

"Zing-g! Zing-g-g!"

Tait leaped to his feet, gun in hand, eyes glaring, gasping for breath, hair on end. The telephone! There had been an axe in the kitchen. He rushed to get it; he slashed the wires; afterwards, in a burst of insensate fury, he smashed the box to splinters.

Then, in the dining room, a silvery-toned French clock beat the hour, with slow and measured chime. One, Two, Three, Four, Five, Six, Seven, Eight, Nine, Ten! Tait could bear no more, the harmless clock sounded like the bells of doom. He fled through the kitchen, he blew out the light, he climbed out of his yet unclosed window and fled for his horse. And as he reached the stable a second horseman trotted briskly through the yard gate.

At San Clemente, just after ten, little Miss Clayton ran across the street to the hotel office, where Emil James was reading up the news of the last month.

"Oh, Mr. James!" she cried, "There's something wrong at Saint's Rest—something dreadful!"

"Out o' sugar?" suggested Emil, laying down his paper.

"Don't! Walter talked to me over the line at eight. Just now Mr. Van Atta 'phoned down—and Walter wasn't there. Mr. Van thought maybe he was up-stairs asleep, and said he'd call me up. When he didn't, I rang again and again and could get no answer. Won't you go up for me and see about it?"

"Maybe the wire's down—tree fallen on it, or something," said Emil reassuringly. "Or else—yes, that will be it. I've got it all figured out now. Charley White just got in from Malibu, half an hour ago. Says they made the biggest kind of a strike in the Golden Fleece last night. Rock all shot full of raw gold. That explosion last spring was the making of them. They made the strike in the new ventilator shaft they're driving. I reckon maybe some one has rode over and told Keough, and he's lit out for the mines."

"No, no! Mr. Van Atta said over the 'phone he left the mine just as Charlie did. If anyone had gone before, Van would have known it. You don't understand. It isn't just this—it's this on top of a lot of other things. Walter has been losing a great deal of money; the worry of it was breaking him down. He has been so strange and—different. Oh, I'm afraid! Do go, Mr. James. Go as a favor to me. I'm afraid!"

"So you think Walter—"Emil checked himself and looked down his long nose. "Perhaps I'd better go. There'll be some simple explanation, likely. I'll take young Watterson and we'll follow the telephone line. Run and call up Van Atta again while we saddle. Maybe you'll get him this time. We'll be ready in a jiffy. And, say, Miss Clayton," he added awkwardly, "I'd—I'd brace up, you know. The better class of San Clemente folks is some gossipy. Run along. I'll do my best for you."

CHAPTER XVI

THE TRAITORS

Resting his gun on the stall partition, his free hand on his horse's nostrils to prevent betrayal, Tait waited. His momentary panic had passed. With the call to action all his evil courage came back to him. The newcomer turned his horse into the pasture, unlocked the kitchen door, and lit up. Tait heard him making a fire, drawing water. Next came the grinding of coffee in the mill, clatter of pans, a whistling refrain. The horse in the pasture hung near the gate, whinnying.

Daring and hardened ruffian as he was, Tait's overwrought nerves could not endure the strain of waiting. If he could slip away unheard, well and good. If not, he would ask a night's lodging as a chance traveller, and, luring the new man into the hall, shoot him by the office door, with disposal of weapons and bodies to indicate that the two men had killed each other. Anything was better than longer suspense.

To reach the gate, he must pass the light streaming from the kitchen window. He came softly, slowly, his hand still on his horse's nose. He was almost to the light when the loose horse in the pasture made loud and vehement call. The whistling stopped abruptly. The man in the kitchen was listening—watching, perhaps. Time for stealth was past. Releasing his own horse to shrill answer, Tait gave the word of the Hungry Stranger.

"Hello, the house!"

"Hello!" It was a startled voice. The door was jerked open; a broad shaft of light leaped into the night; a man in shirt sleeves appeared in the doorway. "Who is it?"

Tait walked briskly up the path of light.

"A stranger. Kin I git a bite to eat?"

"You certainly can," said Keough, pleasantly. This was the one thing needful to establish his alibi beyond a doubt. "All of that. I was just stirring up a large lunch for myself. Put your horse in the pasture. Devilish glad to see you. I've been here alone all night."

"Oh, have you, then?" thought Tait. At this prompt and gratuitous falsehood he suspended his first plan and decided to await developments. "Why—no, thank you. I'll be going on; unless you need a cow-hand? Mr. Van Atta, isn't it?"

"Mr. Van Atta's not here. I don't think he wants to hire anyone. Keough is my name."

Keough! The name on that promissory note was Walter Keough! Tait could almost see his way.

"Then I'll just jog along to San Clemente after I chew some. Pleasanter riding at night anyhow—and I want to get work somewheres. Half out o' money. But if you could give my horse a bait of corn?"

The horse fed, Keough bustled deftly about the supper; eyeing the cowboy curiously. A bold, reckless face, a fierce, hard, dangerous face, thought Keough: a face almost indictable of itself. If only—the pulsing white dents came and went! *Why not?* The evil thought shaped and grew.

"Do you know the Berenda ranch?" he inquired evenly.

"Gibson's home ranch? Yes."

"They shipped from Ridgepole yesterday," said Keough smoothly, "and were to start out home to-day. Some of the boys'll stay in town on a spree, most likely, so there'll be a good chance for you to hook on, if you're on hand at the Berenda to-morrow morning."

"The very thing." With swift thought, Tait ran over the possibilities. To leave this man here, alive, and run away himself, was to proclaim his own guilt. But if he went straight to the Berenda and told a straightforward tale of finding Keough here, and of being directed by him to Gibson's, Keough himself would bear him out. His own course would be that of straightforward, unsuspecting innocence. That he had killed Van Atta, got away, returned, eaten almost in the next room, and then gone straight to Gibson's without any attempt at flight or concealment—no one on earth would ever

believe that. By the same token, he must give his right name. For he was a known man further west, in the San Quentin country, as would certainly be brought out at the inquiry.

"I'm much obliged to you, Mr. Keough. Tait is my name—Bill Tait. Humble is my station. When my hat is on, I'm home, and the Berenda's my destination—where I'll be before daylight. And I guess I'll wash my hands and face a whole lot."

Hunger was Tait's rôle, though every morsel was swallowed by supreme effort of his will. But Keough ate at his ease, daintly indeed, but with thorough enjoyment.

A strange meal, that! Perhaps there was never a stranger. The two smiling, guilty men, feigning goodwill and cheerfulness; the deadly, violent ruffian, and the supple, crafty schemer; each, not willingly, driven to audacious hidden irony, to shape and bend his every phrase to bravado of dreadful after-meaning; each mercilessly betraying the other to shame and death; each exulting in his own shrewdness and cunning; each irrevocably lost!

The meal over, Keough led the way to the hall, lit the chandelier lamps, and produced wine, glasses, cigars.

"A glass with you, Mr. Tait. Then make yourself comfortable and excuse me a few moments. I'm going to bathe, and I must build up the kitchen fire to keep the water-front heating." He raised his glass. "Here's to our better acquaintance!"

"Drink hearty!"

"Now help yourself to cigars and more wine when you want it." He went into one of the curtained rooms, returning with slippers, underclothing, and a bathrobe. These he spread before the fire, now cracking merrily.

Tait held his hands to the blaze. "Looks comfortable, even if it aint cold," he commented. "Not but what it's a leetle mite chilly, for all it was warm enough to-day, before I climbed up in the pine country. You are sure some high up in the air. Must be eight thousand feet, I reckon?"

"All of that. San Clemente is five thousand. You better change your mind and stay all night."

Tait was firm on this point. "I know a short cut across the hills. Was through this country four or five year

ago. 'Twon't take me long to get to the Berenda. Make it before day."

Keough did not urge him. It was not absolutely necessary to sacrifice this man, but after all, it was safer to have him for a scapegoat. That would leave himself beyond even the possibility of suspicion.

"I've got to bring in some wood," said Keough. "That trifling nigger should have filled the box." He stepped in the bath room, tried the taps, poked up the kitchen fire, and ran out to the woodshed.

Meanwhile, the destined scapegoat had been planning on his own account, much to the purpose. As the door closed, he summoned all his desperate hardihood, leaped up, snatched at dressing gown and slippers, and flung open the office door. Swiftly, shuddering, but resolute, he pressed the slipper soles, very lightly, in the thin edge of the clotted blood; sprinkled, with the dagger, a few drops on the dressing gown; closed the door, replaced everything by the fire as it was; and hurriedly slipped the folded promissory note in an inner pocket of the gown.

He shivered. His lips were parched. He gulped down a glass of wine and relit his cigar. Keough found him poking thoughtfully at the fire.

Tait turned. "Well, the best of friends must part, and you'll be wantin' to take your bath. So here's where I do a go. *Much* obliged to you, sir!"

"Don't mention it," smiled Keough. "You can return it in kind, sometime." He refilled the glasses. "To our next happy meeting!"

"Sweet dreams!" said Tait. The glasses clinked together. As Tait mounted, Keough held out his hand, "I wish you luck at Berenda, Mr. Tait. I'll see you again?"

"*Quien Sabe!*" Tait shrugged his shoulders. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

Was there no vision of that next awful meeting—at a gallows foot? Where one should cringe and tremble, where one should mock?

CHAPTER XVII

KEOUGH OPENS A DOOR

Bathed and dressed, Keough pulled the divan by the fire, lit a cigar, and stretched his legs luxuriously.

Complacently, he passed the day's events in review; nothing to wish improved. He felt a wondering admiration for his own resourceful subtlety. Regret, remorse, were no part of his thoughts. If, by raising his hand, the black and treacherous deed might have been undone, he would not have raised it. He was absolutely safe.

Now for the future. Cautious—he must be doubly cautious! Whatever chanced, the buried money must not be used for years. He would pretend to be in desperate straits, would delay payments right and left. If the mine did no better, he would beg Van Atta for leniency. If necessary, he would give up his telephone property on the note. Or, better still, give up his share of the mine. The Golden Fleece had been a good producer for years before it came into his hands. As such, it would always have a certain value, as the lost vein might be found any day. Van Atta was a good fellow. Besides, it was at his urging that Keough had plunged so deeply. Van would remember that. Or could be reminded of it.

After a year—better, two or three—he could begin on the Gibson money, adding it, a very little at a time, to his savings. Vulgar criminals were always caught because they made display of their money. He was too smart for that. He would exercise self-restraint.

He laughed aloud. It was odd to reflect that he really was a criminal. Well! A murderer, then! It was as well to look the matter in the face once for all, before forgetting it. Yet till to-day—(yesterday, it was past midnight now)—he had kept well within the law.

A passing thought of Clara Clayton came to him. He put it by with annoyance. Not good enough for him—now. Sometime, when he could take his proper place in society, he would marry a girl with money and connections. There were good catches even in San Clemente, among that swell bunch. Violet Armstrong, now—mighty good looker. Or perhaps that new girl, Violet's eastern cousin. Nonsense! Vi would probably be married and the black-haired cousin gone back home, long before he would dare to blossom out with his new wealth. Caution, again and again—that must be his part.

He thought of Tait with amusement. Rising, he washed up and put away a careful half of the dishes they had used. Unless Tait chanced to find—*that*—when he first arrived, he would sleep late after his night's ride. Gibson's men would probably get in to the Berenda between eight and nine in the morning. They would find—*that*—and ride a narrow circle for a sign; finding only Tait's trail, thanks to Keough's foresight. Accused, Tait would naturally tell of his visit to Saint's Rest, the meeting with Keough. If he, Keough, respectable, unquestioned, denied it—what chance would Tait have?

The fire was pleasantly bright and cheerful; he was not sleepy. Tossing off a glass of wine, he took a volume of Malory from the shelves, and settled himself comfortably.

Even now, all blood-guilty as he was, if there had been any relenting toward the helpless wretch—(innocent, so far as Keough knew)—whom he had sent through the night to shameful death; if, even now, he had purposed to keep faith with the poor girl whose fault lay in trusting him; again—knowing what awful thing lay beyond the door—he might almost have been pitied. Safe, warm, untroubled, he almost purred in his content.—*What was that?*

He stood up, his face blanched, his heart beat furious and fast. A horse was coming—two! Footsteps on the walk; the door-bell's warm and mellow peal.

Keough turned the latch. "Come in! Emil, is it? And Colonel Watterson, Junior?" He smiled a welcome. "Well, this is good luck. Where'd you blow in from?"

"And here you are, all safe and sound," said Emil. "That's too bad."

"Safe? Of course—why shouldn't I be safe?" Keough was easy now. That Gibson was already found, the alarm given and that suspicion fallen on him so soon—impossible! This was some chance errand only.

The rescuers, a little sheepish at having made a hard ride for nothing, advanced to the fire.

"Why, we thought maybe something had happened to you; Miss Clayton couldn't get an answer over the 'phone," said Emil apologetically. "She was worried about you."

Keough blazed in sudden wrath. So it was this girl's officiousness that had caused him such a fright, and might have ruined him.

"Why, I charged her particularly not to call me upon any pretext!" he said indignantly. The tell-tale marks on his nose showed white against his flaming face. "I'm worn out, dead beat, going broke—and I came up here to get away from it all."

"You see, Van Atta——" began John Sayles; but Emil trod on his toes. Keough's perturbation at the door, the forced note of his welcome, had not escaped Emil. This burst of unreasoning anger in no way lulled his suspicions.

"Van Atta," he explained, suavely, "he struck pay ore in your little old mine yesterday—big rich—dead oodles of it. Charlie White brought the news, and Miss Clayton thought you might be interested."

"Rich ore!" Keough paled again. Why could it not have been a day earlier? For the first time he regretted the murder: as needless risk and exertion. "The wire must be down," he said, relieved. If that was all!

("Now that's queer," thought Emil. "If Van Atta's been here and told him, why doesn't he say so? If not, why doesn't he express, state and declare some slight emotion at them hilarious tidings of great joy? He was down on his luck good and plenty just now.") Aloud he said carelessly: "Anyone been here?"

Almost imperceptibly, Keough hesitated. His boundless egotism decided him; merciless, traitor and coward to the end, he cut away his one slender chance with a heartless lie. If only to spare himself such ugly moments as this, Tait, riding through the night, must be riding to the scaffold. He

would not breathe freely till the man was hung for Gibson's murder.

"Not a soul."

"Hands up!"

Emil's gun was in his face. "Up with them! Go through him, John Sayles."

"No guns," reported John Sayles.

"All right. Watch him, while I look into things."

"Damn you! What's this for? How dare you hold me up this way?" shouted Keough. His anger was not unmixed with fear, though the proceedings seemed to have no reference to Gibson.

"What for?" Emil scratched the side of his long nose. "Really, I hardly know," he said, honestly. "Let's call it general results and let it go at that. Anyhow, I dare, all right. Don't let that part trouble you. There's an air of general mystery and blind-man's-bluff about this night's doin's that's simply displeasin' to my straightforward mind. You telephone to Miss Clayton from here at eight o'clock. Now you say no one has been here. But Jim Van Atta 'phoned from here about ten. Something wrong!"

Van Atta! In Keough's shrunken face the broad, black brows seemed, more than ever, a disfiguring scar: on the pinched nose the white blotches came and went. A plausible lie framed itself instantly. If Van Atta had been here and gone—why, then Keough found the pasture gate open, had ridden the pasture over to see if any saddle horses were missing. Nothing more natural. He felt a pride in his keen and ready intelligence. Was that all? Van Atta had doubtless gone to town. Emil, taking a different trail, had not met him. In some degree he regained his composure.

"You'll regret this outrage!"

"Maybe I will. But you'll never regret anything if you make any break. Keough! Keough!" cried Emil, turning back. "I hope I do regret it. I hope to God I do! But there's something wrong! It's in the air. Your face, your hands, every word, all your actions, confess it and proclaim it. I don't know what you're hidin', but we're goin' to clear it up."

Keough sneered. He was fully reassured. "You are making a tempest in a teapot. You got yourself all worked up and

made a silly gunplay. Of course it disconcerted me. I'm no devil-may-care desperado, and I never claimed to be one. When you stick a gun under my nose, it naturally startles me. Seeing that I'm startled, you give your imagination full play, and scare yourself. Come down to earth! Let's find out what you accuse me of, at least, before you find me guilty and hang me. Van may be in town by now. Let's try the 'phone again."

He opened the office door.

CROOKNOSE

CHAPTER XVIII

PASS OF THE NORTH

From the first the brown river had edged stealthily westward with an eye to Guaymas, keeping within the bounds set by mountain walls, a few hours to right or left, but all the while slyly waiting an unguarded moment for breaking through to the Pacific, along the path of the Yaqui River. A trifle more of westing, to leave a few puny hills to the left, and the thing had been done—the Rio Grande had slipped by the barrier and so southeast across Yaqui country. But from those insignificant hills reached out a finger of inexorable rock, hidden and nameless as the cause that makes you that which you are. Therefore, at Donahue's the Rio Grande is turned snarling to the east, to gnaw and carve a way through three great mountain ranges to the Mexican Sea.

And here is a curious thing. There are no islands in the Rio Grande—save one. That one is precisely at Donahue's, where a stubborn Californian branch bears westward about Greenhorn Island, a minority report: to creep back at last, thwarted, sullen and slow. It may be chance—but in that land of happy names, there is no name for this short, unstoried stream; as if men kept for that baffled hope the silence due to grief.

Below Greenhorn the river whips sharply east, impatient of further delay. Always a twisty and squirmy stream, for the next day's journey it writhes and threshes like a python in death agony. It breaks through Caballo Mountains at Rincon, cuts the valley slantingly across the desert, nearing the eastward range at the proper chisel-angle; and so chisels through at El Paso del Norte.

El Paso, being translated, means The Pass. Seven great railways crowd to this gateway. Transcontinental passengers stop off here. They cross the bridge to Juarez; thereafter saying, complacently, "When I was in Mexico."

The native of New York City, it is said—by natives of New York City—is quiet, prudent and economical. Wickedness and waste are provided for, and by, transients from Wichita, Paducah, Zanesville. It is even so with El Paso, which is New York's closest rival for the crown of naughtiness. The true El Paso nature is singularly domestic and sedate; the attractions are for the transients. So it is said.

That is as it may be. The attractions draw more transients, right enough; which creates a demand for more attractions; which come, drawing more transients; and so on, ad libertine. For the same causes, El Paso's police force, man for man, fears no comparisons.

"Say, you, crooknose!" said Gannon. "What are you hanging around this corner for?"

Crooknose turned slow, gray eyes for better regard of Officer Gannon: otherwise holding his negligent attitude against the wall, his hands resting on the stone quoins.

"For safety, Bullneck. Because you're here."

Now Bullneck was the older and larger man, but the gray eyes held the effect of looking down in kindly banter to a favored child.

"Beat it, you, or I'll run you in!"

"That will be interesting," said Crooknose politely.

Gannon's big body swayed, but his feet clung to the pavement. Of the brown-faced who came to the Pass City, there were some from whom pink-faced men had no profit in their dealings. The policeman was not sorry for the interruption, which now hurtled around the corner.

"Mart! Mart Gannon! I've been robbed!"

The interruption was a pretty boy, about the age of Crooknose; his hat was smashed, his coat torn, his cheek bruised. Gannon knew him for an office-man at the smelter.

"I was hanging around at the Jumbo, just looking on. Big boob with a roll and a jag, buckin' *monte,* and they was dealing seconds on him, see?" The story came in gurgly

blobs, like water from a full keg. "I spots a chance for easy money, so I crossed him, see? It's a snap. When he bets gold on the *cinco,* I'm piking silver on the other card, and so on down the line, see? By the time the gink gets his I'm sixty to the good. Goin' downstairs, two guys clatter past me, one on each side. They grabs me, mashes my hat over my eyes, they frisks me, and they throws me out. Lucky I was most down. See where they tore my coat, getting my leather?"

"Anybody see them? Will you know 'em? Can you swear to 'em?" Thus the law's majesty, blaring.

"Know 'em, nothing! Didn't I tell you they mashes me hat over me lookers? All I see was their backs as they beat it upstairs. I don't want the strong-arms pulled—I want me dough, ninety-five bucks. Thought you was me friend?"

"Friend? I know your name's Parker, if you call that bein' a friend. Whacha want me to do, you sucker? Arrest the whole block? You swear out a warrant and produce witnesses, or else you clear out of this. By your own say, you're a cheat, a piker, a squealer and a chump. Shack, now!"

"Does the concession cover that?" Crooknose left his corner to put the query, lightly, carelessly. "What you say of friend Snipes is eminently correct. You have a happy knack of speech. But isn't friend Jumbo a little on the hog? Winning both sides of one bet—it seems almost greedy. Still, I would not interfere, if they hadn't sent two men to get it from Snipes. I can't forgive that. You'd better trot along, Bullneck, and bring it here."

"Bring it? Who'll I get it of?" Bullneck was chocking-black, but that cold, gray eye chilled him to the bone.

"Oh, just ask the house for it. They'll give it to you. Ninety-five dollars, Snipes? Well, Bullneck, you bring back —oh, say, sixty-five! That leaves a piece of money to split three ways. You can keep all of the thirty, if you want to, but it doesn't pay in the long run—the goose and the golden egg, and all that sort of thing. If Jumbo holds back, you might mention my name—Crooknose—and tell 'em I'm one of the grandest little collectors now at large, and I'll be up presently. Go on now, and get it!"

And Gannon got it.

"Snipes," said Crooknose, "let me put you wise to a few things. Don't cross the sucker bet too pointedly. It's bad form, it tips the game, you'll get yourself disliked. Number two—keep to the wall on dark stairways; it is a sign of bad luck to have a stranger on each side. Thirdly, this is no place for trundle-bed trash. Keep out of this part of town, unless you are a match for any two men."

"Like yourself?" sneered Gannon.

"Exactly. You may go now, Snipes."

"Why—er—thank you!" blurted Snipes. "Can't I slip you a yellow-boy for yours?"

"Me? For that," said Crooknose dispassionately. "I must give you another steer." A quick twist of the collar forced Snipes about. A creditable drop-kick started him on his way: outraged law stood by, subdued.

"So-long, Bullneck!" said this redresser of wrongs. "I got to go up to the office."

CHAPTER XIX

THE DREAM-SHOP

A STIRRING place, the great world, and crowding to the eye: San Clemente, a month away, was dimmed in Katie's mind. The best was, no marvel of all held more of lure than her daily task. For Katie worked in a dream-shop.

Strong, barbaric colors, blankets of Zuñi and the Navajo, basket-work of Pima, Hopi and Apache, pottery of old pueblos; these drew you through the door to ruin and delight. Bead-work and moccasin came next, quiver and belt and bow; then all that the desert gives of quaint and rare: cacti of cliff and plain and hill, flaunting, flaming, scarlet or crimson or blood-red: purple maguey, the yucca's white and waxen bells —cousins, these two, bearing lance and wand; and poor kin to them, *sotol* and bayonet and dagger, spiked and bristling; richest in names of all growing things, these thorny kindreds, strong-fibred, stout-hearted.

Beaten copper, filigree of delicate silver or gold; great locks, hand-forged, with foot-long keys, from churches that flourished and fell when Cromwell ruled in England; petrified wood, heaps of garnets, carnelians, agates, turquoise; arrow-heads of flint or obsidian; quartz, white or creamy; skins of leopards, bear, panther and wolf: such wonderwares and a thousand more the dream-pedlar had brought and blended.

A curtained archway gave on a *posada* of old Spain, fireplace, crane and turnspit, groined roof and mullioned window. Here you dined with Quixote, or tasted the fare of a later land, weird and fiery dishes—*enchilados, chili-con-carne, tortillas, átole;* spiced chocolate or milky *tizwin* for drink, corn-husk *cigarillos* for the devotee.

It was the lucky girl Katie Quinn found herself, blessing

the day that brought the dream-pedlar to San Clemente, seeking jacinth and turquoise.

Under another sky, Kester, the dream-pedlar, had known Katie's father—who was father and mother too, poor girl. But it was not friendship for Tom Quinn which brought her the chance to leave the lonely hill town, though Katie thought so, not knowing that she herself brought the one touch the dream-shop lacked; midnight hair and black-grey eyes and wild-rose cheek, against Filipa's flashing and stormy loveliness, golden Ruth, and porcelain Hilda's slender and flaxen fairness.

There had been one not so well pleased with Katie's fortune. That was Billy Boy. So Katie thought of him—Billy Murray.

The full tide of her fresh-hearted youth joyed in the splendor and flashing lights. Billy Boy, Tom Quinn, whistling home down the trail, San Clemente nestled against the hill-slope, the white mines far above, Ghost Mountain breasting the golden air—in the back of her mind, they were faint and small like the drowse of a lone bee in a pulsing noon.

Katie sold basketry and ores to a pink and white young man of good taste and an infinity of leisure, until he was rescued by an anxious parent; a nice old gentleman beggared himself for gems; and after him came a silken lady with a white doglet.

"That cunning little toy basket—yes, I want that for a jewel-box. How much for this perfectly lovely jade? Oh, that's too high! I can't afford it—now. This lava paperweight is charming. I'll take that. Oh, I did want those fire opals so much! But I suppose I can't have them. Where did you say Mr. Kester got them? Querétaro? Oh, no—Simapan. Wait! Ask the manager if he will please put them aside till my husband can look at them. Oh, you are a new girl here—I had forgotten that. My husband is Mr. Julius Barron. Perhaps I can coax him to buy the jade, too. What stone is that? *Girasol?* I never saw one like it. Now let me see; the red and black jar we were looking at and the Zuñi scarf and the antlers—that will be all for to-day. Send a messenger with the things at once. The manager knows the house number. My change, please."

"Excuse me, madam, but the goods come to more than the twenty dollars," said Katie.

"Twenty dollars? Why, I gave you a fifty-dollar note when I started to go, after I first looked at the opals."

"Your pardon, madam, but it was twenty dollars you gave me. See, I have held it in my hand all the time." Katie's face grew pale.

The silken lady darted a terrible glance at her. "What's this! You have changed it for another bill. You are a thief!" Her voice rose. "Call the manager!" she demanded of Filipa.

"But, Mrs. Barron, will you not look first?" said loyal Filipa. "Thees Katie is a good girl. It is not possible, what you say; there is a mistake."

"I tucked a fifty-dollar bill in the heel of my glove when I left Chaney's, and gave it to this swindler to pay for the scarf and the jar. Will you call the manager, or shall I have you discharged, too?" Mrs. Barron passed from rage to tears.

So Katie was discharged. At the clock stroke life had been sweet and sunny and bright to her; an hour found her shamed and blackened. Not despairing; her spirit rose to fight against injustice. Mr. Kester was afar in Moqui-land; she would appeal to him. He would not believe this dreadful thing of her. Meantime poor father must not know—nor Billy Boy. She remembered an employment agency in the next block. There she gave her slender qualifications and paid the fee.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," said a pleasant voice, as she gained the street; "but I saw you go into the agency. I had just come out, and I cannot resist the temptation to ask you if by any chance you do typewriting?"

Katie looked up at the friendly face.

"No, ma'am, I can't. I can't do anything much." She was very much alone and hungering for a friendly face. She wished with all her heart that it was closing time so she might talk with warm-hearted Filipa.

"Oh, dear! I'm sorry. I was so in hope that you did. You'll excuse an inquisitive old woman; but you're never going to do housework—with that pretty face?"

"Not yet—though that wouldn't be so bad, with nice people. I'm trying to get on at the department stores first."

"Any experience?" The woman walked beside her.

"A little—but I can't bring a recommendation." Katie's lips quivered.

"Trouble? Child, the world is full of trouble." Katie's eyes were brimming now. "There, there! Don't cry, dearie! Come into the park and tell me about it. Maybe I can help you. I have no daughter of my own."

She was kind; she was neat and pleasant to the eye; her hair was graying; Katie was young and unwarned. "And I have no mother," said Katie; and told her short story simply.

"There, there! It's a shame!" said the auditor warmly, when the story was done. "And you think this Mr. Kester is a just man?"

"He knows my father—he knows I couldn't do a thing like that!" sobbed Katie.

The woman considered.

"Let me see! There are four girls, artists, where I have my rooms. Studios—top floor and north light—that sort of thing. But they room there, too. They hate getting their meals at restaurants. Just till your Mr. Kester comes back, would you consider being a play-housekeeper for them? They have been talking of setting up a kitchen for weeks and weeks. It would be easier than to be a beginner in department stores. And they will be wanting to put that sparkling face of yours on canvas, or I am the more mistaken."

Katie dried her eyes.

"I'll try it, ma'am, and thank you for all your goodness to me."

The kind lady clapped her hands to applaud this decision.

"That's settled, then! Now I'll tell you what we'll do: Two of the girls won't be home to-night. You and I will dine together at the Plaza. I'll send a note to your lodgings by a messenger boy. You can have one of my rooms to-night and we'll make arrangements with the young ladies the first thing to-morrow. Indeed, I will be asking them if I may be one of their family myself. Bless me, you don't even know my name! I am Mrs. Holden—Alice Holden, my dear—and glad this once that I was born swivel-tongued."

That is how and why, something after seven, Katie went with Mrs. Holden to a street she had never seen, turned in at

a doorway near the corner of a business block, climbed two flights of stairs, and so came happily into a great hall, very large and very wide, running the full length of the building: a hall of warm, wide rugs and cushioned chairs and glowing bulbs, with a broad skylight over the central space. Under the skylight a mountain lion's hide was spread; on the opposite wall was a pair of splendid antlers.

"Now you make yourself at home here, dearie," said Katie's benefactor, showing her to a cozy and comfortable room, "while I run out and ask about the young ladies. I won't be half an hour."

"If you please," said Katie timidly, "might I write to Mr. Kester while you're gone?"

The kind lady opened a desk.

"There you are—pen, paper, stamps—everything. I'll be right back."

While Katie wrote, Mrs. Julius Barron found the missing fifty-dollar bill in her wristbag.

The Holden woman tapped at the door at the end of the hall. It was answered by a flashily dressed man with a mean and cruel face.

"There's a country girl in my room, Ikey. See that she doesn't get away while I do some telephoning."

So Ikey lolled in a chair near the stairhead. Before the first cigarette was smoked to a stub, three men, loathsome and vicious, came puffing up the stairs.

"Well! Curly? Blink? Ratty? What is this, anyway—a reunion of the Thug family?" demanded Ikey, scowling.

"Yes, and more coming—hear 'em?" said Blink. "The cops are on the raid bigger'n a wolf! Man got croaked at the Midway—and two or three guys lost their rolls along the line and put up a holler. The push is comin' here to duck. There's never been any rough stuff pulled off in this joint—the bulls won't look here."

"You got to dump your gats, then," said Ikey sulkily.

"Mine goes to the discard," said a newcomer, shivering. "There's rangers in that bunch. They go too strong for me. Me, I don't need no gun."

"Well, I do!" growled another, pushing up the stairs. "Me gat stays right wid me—see?"

These sentiments were echoed by perhaps a third of the refugees. They were the dregs of infamy.

"Oh, well; crowd into a couple o' rooms," growled Ikey. "I can't take your guns off—but, mind, if the bulls come I hope they croak you—see?"

There were a dozen in the first vermin flight; more came later, white-faced, slinking.

Katie finished the letter. Now to mail it! She put on her hat before the glass; she went into the hall, smiling; she paused by the lion's hide to thrust forgotten hatpins through her coiling hair. Ikey rose.

"Where you goin', missy?"

CHAPTER XX

CHIPS THAT PASS IN THE NIGHT

THE "office" was exclusive and secluded. The Tivoli provided also three smaller rooms on the second floor, where pikers could lose their money at poker, and which were not above using boosters to start a game—or above anything else except the saloon on the street floor.

The office was reserved for big money. It was on the third floor, in a wide and well-furnished room, making connection with the buffet by dumb-waiter and speaking-tube; and it zealously fostered a profitable reputation for fair-play.

The rest of the floor was given to comfortable bedrooms. Primarily, these were for employees; but auspicious patrons of the office could always find a bed here, and breakfast brought for the bell-ringing. Curiously enough, robbing patrons while they slept was not permitted. They were the guests of the house. The Tivoli was not such a place as the Jumbo. There are degrees in hell, report says.

When you went broke in the office, the house staked you to carfare and settled your hotel bills—without your asking, mind you. The office was very popular.

This was when the town was wide open. All is changed now. Gambling is stamped out. But if you have energy and cash, you may yet get action by guarded queries for the password, being sure to ask the right person. Any person will do.

Even without cheating—which brings up that Hamlet thing again—the Tivoli was a dollar-mill. The kitty, at a five-cent ante, totted to twenty-four dollars daily on each of the lesser tables. In the office, the minimum ante was a quarter, and there was no maximum. The kitty swelled accordingly. This without counting winnings of the house-players, which, by their greater experience and judgment, always outbalanced

their losings in any considerable length of time, even without top-hand manipulation or "paper."

At roulette the percentage in favor of the house was 38 to 36—enough to break any player, how lucky soever, if he played long enough; and so on down the long line—Twenty-One, Senate, Stud, Craps, Seven-and-a-Half—all of which were dealt in the main hall on the second floor. On *monte* and faro, dealt straight, the percentage for the game is negligible. Yet one lost as readily and steadily here as elsewhere: a fact which favors reflection.

On the whole, losers disapproved of cheating; reasoning that with such princely revenues, cheating by the house is greedy and ill-done. They are encouraged in this fallacy by the house: none is so loud in denunciation of cheating as the "honest gambler."

There are two sides to every question. As to greediness, the clients were ill-informed; the outgo was ruinous: for overhead charges, such as rent, license and plant, police protection and blackmail. Then there were squeals to be squared, guarding the "good name" of the house; and the payroll carried high-priced gunners and high-priced dealers. Since the last, unwatched, seldom failed to lose largely to a friend on a fifty-fifty basis, there must be high-priced lookouts as well. There were also an army of cheap boosters and bouncers, and an endless chain of stranded gamblers asking and finding steak-money and stake-money, according to professional tradition. It must be admitted that the stake-money was faithfully repaid, when a diamond ring had been transferred, as a formality, to the lender. It is for this rainy-day cause that the gambler buys diamonds when flush; not from inherent bad taste.

To oppose the ordinary chances of fairplay to this terrific drain would be hopeless: the charge of cupidity falls. The house was often put to it to furnish the "roll." Psychology dictates the roll, the stacked and gleaming gold, the heaped bills, even the "chicken-feed." To know that winning bets will be paid is a small tempting. A different matter is the lure of tangible gold—massed, shining, seducing, drawing with fearful fascination. The eyes sparkle, the fingers ache for it, the blood mounts to the brain.

The house does not object to an occasional big winning by

a client. It is seed scattered for harvest. But, once in a blue moon, some abnormal creature makes a killing, cashes in, goes out the big door, *and never comes back!* This is the dreaded "quitter."

Now, anybody can make at least one stupendous winning, in time—by wasting his life at it; a triumph of wild, blind luck over every device known to the fraternity; but few there be who can keep it. "Quitter" is the most blistering term of the gambler's tongue; the gambler's wife will blush to hear it.

"A good sport" is the winner who comes back. Gamblers are friendly to good sports. And it must be said that gamblers are a pleasant people. They are paid and trained to be pleasant. It is rather a pity that it is not fashionable in other professions—to be pleasant. To succeed greatly in the higher walks of the industry, you must be well-groomed, you must have good looks, good health, good manners and "personal magnetism." Many an adept at dealing seconds or making the pass has lost out because his teeth were bad, his smile alarming, or his voice harsh and ill-modulated.

As to the charge that cheating is unkind or wrong, it is here denied *in toto.* Cheating is the one hopeful feature of the business. Barring the almost extinct quitter—few collectors have more than one specimen—you are doomed to lose, anyway. The per cent. gets you; the better judgment of the houseman gets you; the trained and disciplind patience, the change of shifts, pitting your tired and fevered brain against fresh antagonists: all these things eat you up, whether your madness is for days or years. Disaster stuns you, conscience snarls at you, duty harries you. The smiling professional is doing his duty; his mind is at ease, and easy money is behind him to repair disaster; even an occasional heavy loss is a good advertisement for business. But if he shall cheat you often enough and crudely enough, you may come, in a few years, to realize that you are a fool. It takes longer for some.

So, the cheating seems kindly done. Curiously enough, it is not done through kindness. Nor is it wholly motived by avarice, as is commonly supposed. It is from weariness. Just as the sucker plays for excitement, knowing it to be dangerous, the gambler cheats from weariness, knowing it to be needless. The gambler is bored. He is the most bored man on earth.

It is his punishment. He can get your money without cheating, as easily as Thorpe can outrun you or Ty Cobb out-bat you. But it would take him longer: and, in the meantime, he hates you. He hates your flushed and foolish face, your feverish laughter, your eager clutching at the cards, your invincible, futile hopes; he loathes your credulous folly, that will neither guess nor be warned, your stupidity that will not learn: he envies you alike the pleasure and the pang: he cheats you because he hates you and despises you.

Had the players signed a Round Robin as they sat at the round table, the order would have been: Hike, Lumber, Cigars, Crooknose, Travesy and Moore—which brings the circle back again to Hike the Houseman. Lumber and Cigars were fixtures, business men of the town; they laughed, they told stories, they made fresh bets, they went the high-spade for drinks.

Crooknose was at once the youngest and the most mature of the party. He was unknown. For three days that ominous maturity of quiet eye and strong brown hands that wasted no motion had oppressed poor Hike to shameful honesty. He knew the breed. Evans—so Crooknose gave his name—played a stiff game, at unexpected flashes a brilliant one; lapsing unexpectedly to the safe and sane, and showing an uncanny instinct against disaster. He said little, made no postmortems, and drank not at all.

Travesy—a huge man, scarlet-faced and over-dressed—was in reality part owner of the Tivoli, but the connection was carefully concealed. His cue was rough good nature, his business to inspire confidence. When his chips were taken away and he endeavored to buy more without cash, the transaction was refused: "to encourage the others."

"I know you're all right, but I can't do business on jawbone. Sorry—but it's strictly against rules," said Hike.

So Travesy, visibly miffed, left a marker to hold his chair, and came back presently with much money. These things had their effect. When Hike and Travesy fought out a jackpot between themselves, the showdown usually disclosed a scandalous bluff—privately remarked by Lumber, Cigars, and Jack Moore, promoter, who also joyed over the goodly gains taken by Travesy from the house, to the vast chagrin of Hike. But Crooknose Evans noted that their bluffing was purely mutual;

when others called an unreasonable bet, the only chance to win was to beat a big hand. Silent Mr. Evans also noticed how these two cross-lifted a luckless victim between them—and drew his own conclusions.

Promoter Moore, with Hike on his left and Travesy on his right, was *pro tempore* offensively wealthy; also, of his proper nature, permanently offensive and overbearing: for both which reasons the Tivoli desired his heart. Inopportune Mr. Evans had delayed this consummation; he had Mr. Hike's number. Twice in three days, Travesy, ably seconded by the promoter's purse-pride, had tried to put Crooknose out of the game by making the come-in too large for him; but that imperturbable gentleman had brought forth, without comment, sums surprising for one of his careless appearance.

Moore, with the brutal callousness of a winner, now spoke openly of a trip to Arizona; Erie would relieve Hike at eight o'clock; and Travesty, impatient, gave Hike the signal for Big Business. They played all jackpots. On Moore's deal no one opened.

"And you cash in every night at twelve, Mr. Evans?" said Travesy, as Hike dealt.

"Yes. I believe in the eight-hour day."

"Knew a man once," boomed Travesy, in his rough, hearty way, "that set himself another sort of limit. When he won a hundred dollars or lost a hundred, no matter what time it was, he quit for the night. Sounds like a good plan, doesn't it?"

"I used to win one day and lose the next," said Moore. "Now I only play every other day."

"Evings! I never could do that!" said Cigars genially. "I'm out for the fun more than the money."

"I'm out for the money," said Evans.

Lumber passed; Cigars passed, showing Lumber the high spade; and ordered more of the same. Evans passed; Travesy passed. Moore opened for a small stack. But the game was a big game; every man round the board had won and lost alternately, buying more chips when he lost; and the smallest stacks were staggering, measured by day-wage.

Hike looked over his cards, laughed carelessly, and stayed; Lumber and Cigars passed; Evans stayed.

"I'll draw with you boys myself. I ought to raise, but I haven't the nerve," said Travesty. "One card, when you get to me."

"Asleep at the switch!" said Hike in deep vexation. "I don't suppose Moore would have laid down, but I wouldn't have had you two fiends drawing to four-card flushes on us. Still, I couldn't very well raise. I don't mind letting you fellows see what I am going to draw to." He discarded two and spread the others, face up. "Two tens and a spike ace. Goin' to have a cheap draw, I was, and try for aces-up, or thirty miles of railroad. Oh, well! Cards, gentlemen?"

Evans, Travesy and Moore drew one each. Hike drew two and pushed the deck over to Lumber.

Promoter Moore had been dealt two kings, the ace of spades, the joker and a trash card. The joker is always an ace in Texas. He drew a third king and bet largely.

"I hope you gentlemen make your flushes, I'm sure. The more the merrier." Hike looked at his draw, knuckled his chin, and stayed. "Oho! Caught your other ten? Hard luck, old man—hard luck!" said Moore.

Crooknose Evans, unhurried, sized a stack up to the promoter's bet.

"Afraid to raise—on a flush?" taunted the promoter. "Bah!"

"I always play my hand to suit myself, you know," said Evans, unangered. "And this looks like a good place to get off. What you got?"

"Hold on! Ho-old on!" boomed Travesy. "I'm in this thing yet!" He raised the pot for another stack. "Mine's all green. The hide goes with the tallow!"

"All green? That won't buy you much. Your one only play was to call. Evans played his hand right. He understands poker," said Moore. His piggy eyes shone greed; his pulpy cheeks tightened to a cruel sneer. "Now I'm going to prize the roof off. There's no use sending a boy to mill." He raised with an insulting flourish. "I always expected to make a hog-killing in this joint!"

Hike saw the doubled raise and raised yet again.

"I've got one more squeal in me, at that!" he observed.

Quietly and unhurried, Mr. Evans saw the three successive

raises and further contributed his entire pile of expensive chips; a goodly pile, for he had been winning.

"Domino!" said Mr. Evans mildly.

Travesy flung down his hand. He had nothing; his bets had been made to tempt the Moore money to the open. He was a hardened gambler, but he eyed Crooknose askance. A fortune was at stake beyond any previous hazard of the Tivoli. He knew that Evans had not been expected in on the play; it was possible that pure chance had sent him better cards than the four tens which Hike was to hold. For the house must merely win, without frequent holding of invincible hands, which is bad form.

Moore's arrogant manner had left him; sweat stood on his heavy jowl; he called, but his hand twitched. He had few chips left.

Hike called. Hike also felt curiosity as to the chance-held hand of friend Evans. But, after all, it was not Hike's money, and he was acting under instructions: all he had to lose was a job. Besides, he had warned Travesy against Evans.

"It's hard to hold my mouth just right," he confessed. "All right, Mr. Evans. Beat me and buy the drinks!"

"Beat you!" Moore smote the table with his heavy fist. "Damn you, Hike, I've got you skinned a mile! I'm sweating blood, but there's the man I'm afraid of." He jerked his thumb at Evans. "You—you've got a ten-full at best. You can't have an ace-full, for one ace was faced in the discard. Here's mine!" He spread down his king-full.

"I am also afraid of Mr. Evans—not of you. I have here four large, juicy tens—forty miles of railroad! What is it, Evans—a gold chain or a wooden leg? What you got?"

"Oh, me?" said Crooknose pleasantly. "I got a six-full!" It appeared, a clicking flash in his left hand; the muzzle was at Travesy's ear. "Quiet!"

Quiet ensued.

"Mr. Moore, pass your left hand carefully under the edge of the table toward Mr. Hike. You will find two cards there, held in a clip. Mr. Hike exchanged them for his two tens. I saw him do it. Coarse work, Hike; coarse work! You grieve me!"

Mr. Moore produced the cards. Mr. Moore was subdued—not to say extinct.

"Now, Mr. Hike, go softly and bring the bankroll from the checkrack. Very softly! The bills only. Never mind the hard stuff. . . . I thank you! I will not stay till twelve tonight, I believe. This will do me nicely. Moore, you are entitled to this little pot—you had the high hand, leaving Hike out. I'll keep the money and you take the chips. Tinhorn Travesy will cash 'em. He can't afford to chiprack you. He's the owner, you know. By the way, Travesy had nothing in his hand but cards—same as I did. He was just in to crosslift you. Well, I must be going. Got a gun, Travesy? Never mind, keep it. You're welcome to follow me—but, if you come, come a-shooting!" He backed out, closing the door behind him.

As young Evans ran swiftly down the stair, he knew that the speaking tube was in action. Could he gain the street by speed, or must he fight his way out? Neither: he did what may be expected from his kind: the unexpected.

By terrible and evil ways his reckless feet had reached the silent stairway. Perhaps they were sent there. Midstep between foot and floor he made a swift choice; and so, unknowing, turned his back on shame forever.

He entered the swinging doors of the long gambling room on the second floor, passed through quietly, unnoticed in the crowd, and went hurriedly up a rear stairway to the floor he had just quitted, even as his late companions poured down the front way to swell the alarm. There was, as he knew, a way to the roof—half stair, half ladder. He unhooked the door and stepped out into the hot, still night.

The Tivoli was on a corner. In the starlight he turned northward across the uneven, flat roofs, searching for a way of escape through another building; and so, near the further end of the block, he saw a mellow glow ahead. It came through a skylight. He knelt beside it and peeped down into the lighted hall.

CHAPTER XXI

CROOKNOSE REPRESENTS

THERE were antlers on the wall; a lion's skin was on the floor; a girl stood beyond, just putting the pins in her hat. Evans could see her face; it was fresh and smiling and happy. She took a step forward; a man came to meet her. A little corner was broken from a pane—Evans heard their speech.

"Where you goin', missy?" said Ikey.

The girl drew herself up, startled.

"I don't know you, sir!"

She stepped aside to pass him; but Ikey kept beside her.

"Leaving? Oh, I guess not! You're going back to your room—that's what!"

Her voice shook.

"I'll call for help!"

" 'Help'?" He laughed cruelly. "Help? Take a good look!"

Her hand was at her throat. A sudden knot of men were in the hallway—four—six—eight; still they came from opening doors—rat-faced, grinning, leering.—*Oh, Billy Boy! Father!*

On the roof, unseen, Crooknose rose, snarling—the clean and wholesome scoundrel. A woman glanced from a doorway and turned back, indifferent, shameful. Then Katie knew.

"Oh, *God!*" The word came in a dreadful shriek. Ikey's hand was on her mouth.

"God?" croaked Ikey. "If God has any affairs in this house, He'd better represent!"

He said no more on earth. Crooknose crashed through the skylight, shooting as he came. He shot as he fell, sprawling; he shot again from hand and knee. Thrice dead, Ikey dragged the girl down as he fell.

The flash and roar of many guns: Crooknose charged. Flame darted before him and men fell at the flame. Katie saw him,

blazing terrible, alone. He staggered through lances of intersecting fire; his heavy gun crashed out a shrieking face; he sprang aside, in, out and back; and smote and parried, and smote again. There was a rush of swift help—to aid the ten against one. Shouts, oaths—screaming, hideous faces, glitter of guns, down-striking—all rushed together as the mercy of blackness came to her.

Crooknose fought on. His last cartridge was fired as he broke through the bullet zone. Pain tore him; arms clutched at him; they bore him down; he was up, he struck with gun and fist and foot and knee. They were too many, they could not shoot without killing each other; the blows of guns and arms crashed together in midair to save him; they slipped on blood, they trampled on living bodies, they crushed him, they were dragging him down! A helmet at the stairhead, a bluecoat—Gannon!

Evans heaved up; he broke his gun-arm loose and hammered; he shouted high and clear:

"A straight girl, Bullneck! Get her out!"

"Ho-O!" bellowed Gannon. His automatic pumped death into the shuddering tangle—three shots. Then, from an alcove, other *macque*-men poured upon him; arms choked him from behind; hands twisted the gunbarrel aside. Gannon heaved and twisted and strained; his great arms crushed and lifted; the man clutching the automatic felt the stair rail at his hip, bent back and fell screaming down the stairwell to death; the gun went with him. The choking arms at Gannon's neck relaxed, a foe fled down the stair. Gannon rushed on, roaring, blood-mad. Forgotten was the nightstick in the sling; two Irish fists swung out, he plowed a way into that hell of hate. Bullneck and Crooknose, grafter and thief—they struck and swung and fought the shame and the men of shame; struck and staggered and came again.

The hammering gun rose slowly now, it fell feebly. Crooknose reeled and stumbled, his left arm hung helpless, his eye was glazing. He struck once more, a wild and random blow; hands caught his wrists and twisted; the gun dropped. The hands dived for it; but Crooknose took a neck in the choking crook of his arm—a neck that went with the hands—and dropped to a huddle on the floor, dragging the neck with him

in the locked arm. A thug bent over him, with a pistol to his very ear; and fell, faceless, before Gannon's heavy boot. Loyal Bullneck bestrode his fallen ally. His hand fell to the forgotten billy; he swung out mightily; hell beat upon him. . . . Ages after, the snarling faces faded away.

Gannon looked down then at sprawling Crooknose, and mused at him. The clothes were torn from Crooknose; he was bare to the waist, blood gushing along the white skin, blood on his tawny hair, a blackened face gripped under his arm. It was very curious, thought Gannon, only dimly aware that shouting men poured from the stairway—Captain Hughes of the Rangers, roundsmen, citizens—or that such *macque*-men as were not writhing on the floor, or lying very still there, stood hands up before a score of pistols.

"Gannon! Gannon! What's happened here?"

Gannon stood in drifting smoke and passed a hand stupidly across his face. This was McCabe, his sergeant, calling him. Now how did McCabe get here? Gannon looked beyond McCabe to Hughes of the Rangers: he spoke jerkily, breathless, groping for words:

"Captain Hughes—straight girl here! He said so—Crooknose. You, Captain—straight man yourself—you take care of her! Back there, she is. Take her home yourself. Mustn't let nobody see!"

He looked down to Crooknose for further counsel.

Captain Hughes knelt by Katie. "Just fainted! I'll take care of her," he reported. "But this man here is most mighty dead! Three shots! Some shooting! Who did it, Gannon?"

Gannon pointed with his nightstick.

"Him—Crooknose. Dead, I guess. Never mind. Him and me—old Crooknose—we done it!" He smiled foolishly and sank to a place beside his friend.

"Lord!" said Hughes, as he lifted Katie and crossed the shambles. "All this was while we was getting upstairs! I wasn't twenty yards from the door at the first shot!"

"Hurt? Who? Him? Crooknose?" said Gannon, propped and bandaged in a hospital bed. "Divil a bit! Arm and some ribs broke; shot a little around the edges; a few taps on the head; maybe a bruise here and there along the rest of him—

nothing serious. He's all right! God certainly is good to the Irish!"

"Irish nothing! Evans is a good Welsh name, as all the world knows," said Captain Hughes hotly. "Do you stick to your shamrock and Saint Patrick and do not be robbing your neighbors!"

"If his name is really Evans?" said the Chief of Police sourly. "Evans or John Doe, it's a nice stone cell for his when he gets well!"

"For the looting of the Tivoli, is it? Him? And after that fight he made?" Gannon sat up in bed, his eyes fever-bright, and shook a bandaged fist at his astounded chief. "Hear me now, ye black scut! You can put the rollers under me and damned to you—but touch one hair of the brindle head of him and I br-r-eak you, ye gr-rafter!"

DICK

CHAPTER XXII

PRIVATES OF INDUSTRY

"Well?" Mendenhall smiled broadly. "Do you hear opportunity kicking in the front door? Shall we let her in, or do we call the police?"

A cone of mellow light fell softly on one corner of a Gargantuan desk. A few bits of ore were scattered within that shining circle, samples from the Torpedo-Sundown Consolidated. Clem Gray laid a paper beside them. His hand trembled a little.

"If you're sure the assay is straight and if there's any such body of ore as your borings indicate—why, with copper the price it is, we are all rich. The Torpedo is a made mine."

"Clem," said Mendenhall, "you amuse me; you do indeed. Your simplicity is quite refreshing. As your poor father would have phrased it, you are a pointblank fool. You seem to think I am going to let the stockholders in on this. Guess again."

"But—how—why——" stammered Gray. His face was blank.

"I'll spell it out to you." Mendenhall sat back in his swivel chair and grinned complacency. "You're on your feet, Clem; push over that box of cigars, will you? Help yourself. Sit down."

"Now," he continued, when his cigar was fairly alight, "here's the proposition: No one is to make one round red copper cent but you and me and the superintendent—unless we're absolutely forced to let old J. C. in. We may have to do that to pull it off. I would much prefer to skin him. Bull-

headed, overbearing old roughneck, Armstrong is. But he owns a biggish share of stock, and he's from Missouri."

"I haven't the least idea of what you are talking about," declared Gray.

Leaning forward, Mendenhall laid his heavy hand on Gray's knee.

"We'll freeze out the minority stockholders. Nothing doing but assessments, trouble and more trouble from now on until we can buy their interests at our own price."

"My aunt!" Young Gray sat up with a feeble giggle. "And their money paid for all the development work, didn't it?"

"Your father and I put in the mine for half the capital stock. The proceeds from sale of the other half developed the mine, certainly."

"And every cent the mine has produced has gone right back into it for more machinery, buildings, wagon roads," cackled Gray. "All the money that might have gone for dividends?"

"Well, not quite all. Some of it went for operating expenses. Your father, as president and general manager, and myself, as secretary—we drew good salaries, Clem; quite fair, quite fair!" said Mendenhall complacently. "The mine superintendent, too—man of great technical knowledge—his salary was a fat and juicy cut. Your dad and I, we had the naming of the superintendent, and we made a very satisfactory arrangement with him. We bought supplies, too; let contracts for freighting, for mine timbers, and all that."

"Stop, Uncle Herman; you'll be the death of me," said Clem Gray. "Oh, you sly old dog! You and the old man were getting yours, no matter what the mine did, eh?"

"Mining is a risky and uncertain business. I never cared much for mining. Other people's money, my son—other people's money—that's the surest thing there is. And, of course, there was always a chance that the mine might pay. The Bennett-Stephenson has been a steady producer since sixty-six. Strictly speaking, the Torpsuncon has always made a modest return on the investment. But we have paid few dividends, except at first, because"—Mendenhall coughed modestly—"because of our foresighted policy of reinvestment for permanent betterment."

"And now that you've really struck something big—by the

use and risk of their money—you're going to take it away from 'em!" Young Gray rocked with glee; his voice was a thin crow. "Oh, this is too rich! Gets 'em comin' and goin' —what? You're the ticket, gov'nor! I string my bets along with you. Go on, tell us how you're goin' to do it. I'm sure I don't see."

"Easy as silk. Since your father died, I've acted as both president and secretary, and Spencer has been both superintendent and general manager. It was our own proposition. We put it up to the stockholders, as a measure of economy—clear saving of two salaries—self-denying ordinance. 'Twas much appreciated. But we were figuring on this very possibility. The mine kept shaping up better as we went down, and we wanted to have everything in our own hands. Spencer is my man. I can hang him or get him a life sentence at best. To make sure, I gave him a bunch of stock. Five thousand shares. He's mine."

"Excuse me if I interrupt, but why did you take me in?"

"Mostly because I need your votes to retain control," explained the elder man simply. "Partly, I hope, because you are old Pete Gray's son. Pete and me was pardners all our lives. We've seen more downs than ups, I want to tell you. You may not believe it, but Pete and me were fairly decent chaps when we were down—and young. Gettin' old and up is what plays hell with a man. However, comma, old Pete's boy is different from other folks—to me. Not but what you want to watch me," he added hastily.

Gray reassured him.

"I'll keep an eye on you, all right. A man that will play this merry little prank on his backers will do most anything."

"That's funny, too—your dad never would stand for this play I'm pulling off," said the old man musingly. "I've talked it over with him. "Aw, give the poor boobs a run for their money, Hermie,' he says. 'Give 'em a fair break at what little outside chance they've got,' he says. But since he died, when any working began showing up extra good, Spence and me took the gangs off and set 'em to work somewhere else. The old Torpedo has been shipping nothing but her lowest grade ore—and, by George, she's paid a little, even so, and freightin' forty miles to a railroad. But this is the first ore

body we've ever struck worth the trouble of playing the freezeout game to a finish. It's going to need careful playing, too. Hey! What are you looking so glum about?"

"While you were shipping low-grade ore and cutting out dividends—suppose I had sold out, hey?" demanded Gray indignantly. "Nice game, ain't it—and me in the dark? Oh, you'll bear watching, all right—fox!"

"Now listen here, Clemmy, didn't I always advise you not to sell? Listen now, didn't I tell you if you needed money not to sell Torpedo, to come to me every time, that I'd lend you money—didn't I, Clem? You mustn't go to thinkin' that of me. A fellow's got to believe in something, and he's got to be square with some one. Not on your own account altogether, but old Pete's boy—I wouldn't do old Pete's boy. Honest, I meant to let you in all along, if the play came off."

"Oh, so you say," said Clem sulkily.

"Don't you believe me, Clem? You don't have to believe me—see for yourself. I had to have you, Clem—had to have your stock to pull it off. I couldn't buy you out if I wanted to. Haven't got the money. That's right. I've been blowin' in the mazuma like a carpenter sows nails. But you've got a lot of old Pete's money yet. You put your money in against my brains and we hammer Torpedo down and buy it all. You and me and Spence own about forty per cent. of the mine between us—so much that we can easy run things to suit ourselves, for all the resident stockholders can do. They ain't likely to interfere, anyhow. The scheme I'm going to work will make them fall right in and help cut their own throats—you'll see! Old Armstrong is the only one I'm afraid of, him and his old, long, hard head. If he gets his back up, we'll just have to take him in, that's all. With him, we'll have a clear majority of the stock, Eastern proxies and all—but, Lordy, I hate to go snooks with J. C."

"Would he come in?"

"Who—J. C.? On the high moral lay, you mean? Hell, I hadn't thought of that! Maybe he wouldn't. We'll make a big try without him."

"What's your scheme? I'm quite in the dark. I understand that none of the good ore went to the company assayer.

The suckers won't have any way of knowing we've struck it rich. That's as far as I've got. Go on from there."

"We'll have a strike. Tie up the mine indefinitely," said Mendenhall, with an oily smile. "These chuckle-headed Cornishmen are ripe for it. They've been growling for more mine props and four dollars, and every gang to do their own timberin'. Spencer will give 'em less stulls and poor lagging; he'll put a gang of Mexicans timberin' up—measures of economy, which will commend themselves to the support of the stockholders—that sort of thing."

"On the level," said Clem, "those suckers ought to be robbed—stockholders, not miners. I'm rather an ass myself, as you so kindly remind me from time to time; but even so, I can see that safe timbering is the cheapest timbering."

Mendenhall tugged at his square gray beard and eyed his young guest reflectively.

"Sure. That's because you really know a little about the work at first hand. Perhaps you wouldn't be such a fool, Clem, if you had done more work. I always warned Pete he was making a mistake with you. Lord, it's a queer world! If your mother had lived, Clem, we might all have been different—you, anyhow. She named you after this old town, boy."

"Never mind about me. I get ample information about myself every day, from the most surprising quarters. You had got as far as dealing mine props from the bottom," prompted Clem. "Go on from there."

"Oh, yes! Spence'll turn 'em down, and he'll do it ugly. If necessary, he'll cut their wages to three dollars. They're getting three-fifty now, and wanting four. It won't be necessary. Hot-headed bunch, these old-timers—and they really should have more timbers than they've been getting lately. They know it; they'll quit on that proposition without waiting to see about wages. And there's a hundred mean little ways of irritating men—ways that these inarticulate people won't be able to explain."

"Maybe only part of 'em will quit. There's no union here," observed Clem.

"No, there's no union; San Clemente is cut off from the rest of the world about as much as if we were on an island.

But that very isolation makes folks stick together. And these people are clannish. They'll strike, and they'll stick. The rest will be easy. The management will be firm but stubborn. Why not, when we don't want 'em to go back to work? Capital lying idle—overhead piling up—armed guards at a fancy price—sump filling up with water—assessments—and down comes the price of Torpedo-Sundown Con!"

"Kind-a tough on the workin' Johnnies, what?"

"Cousin Jock? Do 'em good. Take 'em down a peg. They've been pretty darned independent here lately. They'll all be more tractable for us when we need them. And they won't come to any real grief. All these cowmen will be doing the Red-Cross act—women and children first. I'm glad of that, too. Mighty insolent, uppity lot, cowmen. They've always had a good deal to say about how San Clemente mines was run. I'll be glad to see that big-mouth bunch dig down in their jeans to play our game for us."

"We'll have to make a bluff at getting another crew of miners," said the young man thoughtfully.

"Yep—Mexicans. They'll scare the Mexicans off. That will set the Mexican freighters against 'em, and the courts, and the Mexican population generally."

"Race-feeling—perpetratin' dastardly outrages on life and property—that sort of thing?" laughed Clem.

"Exactly. Alienate any possible sympathy that might be coming from the minority stockholders who live here, too, if we can only stir 'em up to a little violence. Once we get a foolish gun-play started, the justice of their original demands will be lost in the dust."

"Ship in some one on the sly," said Clem, "keep him in funds, make it his job to keep the whisky going. That will turn the trick. John Barleycorn is what turns public opinion."

"You said it, son. Once the strikers get to hellin' round, old J. C. will be red-hot against them. He'll close down his thinking machine till the miners come to his terms—he'll think they're his terms, he'll not suspect us; and so he'll not throw in with the scatterin' Torpedo stock to investigate. That's the important point—old J. C. Armstrong counts for more than courts or cowmen. Without him both strikers and stockholders will be playin' without ace, face or trump."

"You're sure the assays are straight, Uncle Herman?"

"Sure. No 'if' for me. I trust no one. I went in after the last shots on the six-hundred-foot level and picked up my samples before the muckers came. Sent one to Denver, one to San Francisco, and one to the State School of Mines. The assays checked—allowin', of course, for a slight difference in the specimens. Same with the South Tunnel, which is only a little higher than the Six Hundred Drift. The borings were made under my personal supervision, and Spencer had all the cores mixed in the orebins except what I sent away. And them assays tallied, too."

"Then we'll make a killing. When do we begin?"

"Right now. You go send Spencer up. Don't come back yourself. No need for you to be mixed up in it openly. You never can tell—we may get in trouble. I'll give Spence his instructions. These Welshmen used to growl at Pete's driving them," said Mendenhall jovially. "I'll make 'em think my little finger is thicker than old Pete's loins.

CHAPTER XXIII

HOW DICK CAME TO SAN CLEMENTE

By the converging cattle trails Rainboldt had known for an hour that water was near by. He came upon the ranch suddenly, deep-hidden in a hill-sheltered cove. He drew rein at the silent house.

A window swung open on creaking hinges. Dust lay lightly on the side of it. Dust lay thick on the floor of the empty room. Rainboldt rubbed his nose thoughtfully. Wiseman, his claybank horse, brought bright eyes to bear upon the situation, and twitched an ear back at his master. They passed on to the corral.

Cattle sunned themselves in the corral, comfortably asleep on the warm sand, or gathered in congenial groups—Herefords, line-backed, white-faced, sleek and tame. They made way grudgingly. Wide-eyed calves peered fearfully at the intruder. Rainboldt slipped the bridle off and hung it on the saddle horn; he loosened the cinches; he slapped the claybank's neck.

"Go to it, you li'l' ol' son-of-a-gun!" he said. "Drink hearty!"

Wiseman dipped his velvet muzzle daintily into the brimming coolness of the upper trough. There were six water troughs, wide and deep and long, ranged stair-fashion down the slope; the slender overflow from each successive trough fell to the next below with a blurred and pleasant bell note; a clinking of fairy anvils, a sound of mimic echoes slight and silver, blended to drowsy music.

Wiseman sighed blissfully and closed his eyes for a little repose. Rainboldt opened a gate into the well yard; he drank from the clanking pump; he washed his face and hands. The

windmill creaked and complained. An oil can hung beside the pump. Rainboldt climbed the tall steel tower and oiled the gearing. He washed his hands again at the trough and viewed with disfavor certain wind-blown oil spots on his corduroys. He punched Wiseman with his thumb.

"Hi!" he said. "'Sail on—sail on—sail on—sail on!'"

Wiseman eyed him with mild reproach, but thrust out his head for the bit. Rainboldt swung lightly to the saddle and rode out at a footpace, southward through the glowing sun.

The horse was slender and sleek and glossy-dun, broad between the eyes, deep-shouldered, short-coupled; his legs were dainty, flat-boned, black-barred, his neck arched. A brown stripe lay along his back and down his shoulders; foretop and mane and tail were long and heavy and black. The rider was something under thirty, slender and tall and brown. His supple body swayed with easy and unconscious mastery. Every move of the man was coördinated, quick and sure; he bore himself joyously; youth danced in his eyes.

But the face, bold and pleasing, was yet in some way oddly older than his body; lightly lined, alert, holding something in reserve—the face of a man steeled by adversity. A mouth fit for laughter, capable and generous, was schooled to quietness; the keen dark eyes had a trick of quiet watchfulness.

To the left, far below, bare and white and blinding, the overwhelming desert stretched away and away to a line of dim and misty hills. Rainboldt knew that blistering plain to be almost water level. It seemed now, as he looked down upon it, uptilted to an interminable slope, along which his eye toiled wearily—up, up, up, till those far-off misty hills on the farther verge seemed the very rooftree of the world.

He rode sidelong athwart a tremendous and hill-strewn slope, wide-flung between the horns of a crescent range, following an old road across an endless succession of long, straight ridges, with shallow draws between, plunging headlong to the glaring levels below.

The granite-born soil—yellow, tough, compact and firm—rang under the shod hoofs. The wide road, untraveled now, had once been traveled greatly, bitten deep into the narrow ridges; always it edged upward, elbowing between sharp, bleak hills.

Behind, the northern horn of mountain was square and grim, flat-topped, breast and square shoulders wrapped with the deep black of cedar and piñon, the square head crowned with misty pine. To the right, beyond and above the knobbed and bouldered foothills, swept a long curve of wave-edged ridge—smooth, rounded, granite brown, granite yellow, granite pink—bare, save for glossy-green dots of mountain laurel, the olive gray blotches that were clumps of scrub oak.

A slender and symmetrical cone of golden granite, at the south, soared high and gleaming above that long ridge, and ended it; beyond, a deep-cut notch, sharp and very narrow, V-shaped, opened the only window to the west. And then——

The farther horn of that great crescent swung away, south and east, a titanic and crenelated parapet, shining and sheer, fantastic, glorious, incredible. So lately that the knife-sharp edges were yet unblunted, central fires had thrust that stupendous mass through the torn crust of earth, all at once and violently, incandescent, glowing, cooling to spire and spine, needle and lance, tower and dome; rose-edged, tawny in the shadows, golden in the sun, inky black in cleft and gorge.

The traveler threaded the last foothills and came out to the upper reaches, below the mountain proper; the road bore straight for the great notch, the only practicable pass.

Wiseman cocked up his ears and whinnied softly. Rainboldt brought his eyes back from the southward crest, followed the pricking ears, and became aware of a man on a dust-colored horse, toiling up the next ridge. Rainboldt crossed over and came there to a well-traveled road. He curled his leg over his saddle horn and waited. The newcomer joined him; a tall man with a long nose, a long mustache and a long, serious face.

"Howdy!" said Rainboldt. "Do you live far about her to do any good?"

"Seldom ever," said the tall man. "How's your health this evenin', or ain't it? I never saw you look better."

"Got the makings?"

"*Seguro!* Help yourself."

Rainboldt rolled a smoke and puffed luxuriantly. Then he said:

"Excuse me, sir, but could you tell me where I'm going?"

"Easy. You're going to supper with me."

Rainboldt's face was wooden and his eye was vacant.

"Supper?" he said slowly. "Supper. . . . I wonder what that is? What is that?"

The tall man grinned joyously.

"I got you, Steve! You've been meanderin' down the east side. And you haven't seen anybody or anything to eat."

"Oh, I don't know. I saw a man some time last week. And I been shootin' cottontails. I had matches, and found some salt, one place."

"Come along with me. Emil James is the name. Glad to meet you."

"I'm Dick Rainboldt. I'm glad to be met. I'm glad to meet anybody. Say, I want to speak to you a minute. Over here."

He rode to one side; he glanced anxiously round at the towering mountains and the immensity of desert; he lowered his voice.

"Explain!" he said, in a sepulchral whisper. "What's happened? I can bear it. Let me know the worst. Tell me!"

"'Explain'?"

"Everything." Dick waved his hand grandly. "Why haven't I seen a man since I left the Mal Pais, and an empty ranch house every so often? Why did I find a ghostly, ghastly mining camp, all full of rusted engines and machinery, with the windows rattling and the doors squeaking; stone shacks along the hills, with flat roofs and them falling in; a million wagon roads all crisscross, with grass grown up in the ruts; and prospect holes with rotten timbers; a row of wagon roads all side by each, straight down an upandicular mountain where no wagon could possibly get up, not if it was ever so—everything. Tell me. I never felt so darned ignorant before, not in my whole life."

Emil James laughed indulgently.

"It's a right smart step to supper, brother. Let's ride. I'll educate you as we go along."

"First of all, what you call them mountains?" Dick jerked his chin to southward.

"La Fantasia."

"Dream Mountains was my guess. Pretty close guess, what? Some hills!"

"'Some hills' is right," said Emil James lovingly. "I guess yes. Let me introduce San Clemente Gap—and the big fellow all alone, no'th of the Gap, that's San Clemente Peak. There isn't any name, rightly, for the rest of it till you get to Old Pinetop, where all your steep wagon roads was. Wood roads, them was, hauling to the Sunol mine, where the windows rattled. The *paisanos* would creep up the ridges mebbe three or six miles to the west, shin up a low place to the eavestrough, worry back east till they came opposite the Sunol, chain a load of wood on, lock all four wheels, say a prayer, shut their eyes, and slide down. Twelve miles up and one mile back."

"I savvy! And every time it rained the old road would gully out so bad they'd have to make a new one. Yes indeedy! And silver went down?"

"And silver went down. It did so. Tumultaneous with that the camp went up. No flowers. This was once as lively a little corner as you might wish to see. The Sunol might mebbe have kept on producin'—they had some gold, too—but they struck heap water and blowed the roll pumping it."

"And now," prompted Dick, "about the hundred-and-some-odd miles of cattle and nary a man?"

"Cattle don't drift north. They can't cross the desert—too far enough to the first water, and none there. 'Way, 'way south there's some Texas lads with leased land and fence strung nearly part way across. So our stuff can't go south either. The main range is so straight up and down that the birds go round—and every little cañon is fenced in the narrowest place—so the cattle can't get west. Except right here at San Clemente Pass. Bein' as San Clemente town—big copper camp—is right beyond the Pass, we just natchally quit our ranches and come up here where it would be handy to play poker and get married, and things like that."

Rainboldt rubbed his thumb along his slender brown mustache and rolled a preternaturally wise eye skyward.

"No, sir, you're mistaken. The boys don't steal cattle any more," said Emil pensively. "I don't know why. Just isn't fashionable now. I was strong against it at first, but after all

maybe it's about as good a way as any. The stock can't get away; they might as well be on an island. So we work 'em twice a year, and each fellow only gets his own. You don't get rich so fast—but then you don't get poor so fast, either."

"We-e-ell, it might work," conceded Dick doubtfully. "And so you all live in San Clemente?"

"Not so as you could notice it. Sometimes, when we get hard up, we slip over there and work in the mines a few days. But there's a strike on now. No, sir; we live over on this side, strung along right against the foot of the mountain, at the little springs. Sheltered from the big southwest winds here, you see. That's what dries up the grass, them winds; and they don't strike in the hills and cañons and parks, up under the main mountain; hop right over. So we have some green grass all the year round. That keeps our saddle horses fat and contented, so they don't wander round. We have it pretty soft; plenty scrub oak for wood, nothing much to do but make our little gardens, and maybe ride round and grease windmills once a week."

"Or ten days?" suggested Dick.

"Or ten days. Then we have our little old mountain to look at, too. That helps." His eye lingered along those happy battlements. "Sightliest spot in the world, I guess, and all the better for that out yonder." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder, without looking, to indicate the blistering desert. "The hill ain't nigh so fine from San Clemente. They're two or three thousand feet farther up in the air than we are on this side. Nobody minds lopin' three or four mile to town after a match, or to get the mail; but we wouldn't exactly live there. Cast your eye along that bunch of three-cornered parks leaning along the hill, and you'll begin to see where we live, about one ranch to each park."

"I see 'em," said Dick. "You don't know nobody that don't want to hire nobody that don't want to work, do you?"

"Slim chance. There's just about enough of us for a full crew. But you're mighty welcome to hole up with me till the wagon starts next full. Maybe-so you might catch on somewheres, here or on the West Side."

"How about the mines? I can swing a sledge some."

"Aw, you don't want to do that. Cousin Jock and Taffy,

they're striking for a little more money—which maybe they don't deserve, I dunno—and for a lot more props in the workings which they certain-l double-e ought to get. We want the strikers to win. Them mines ain't even half safe. Rotten shame! The owners tried to work Mexicans a while. But even a Greaser can see that them Welshmen are dead right about the timberin', so they mostly quit. Not such a bad lot, the *paisanos.*"

"Any rough stuff?"

"We-ell, no, not to speak of. There might be if the sign was just right. I hear about some imported gunmen maybe a-comin'—a bunch of strike breakers they used in the coal mines at Cerrillos and Gallup. If they come to San Clemente —good-night, nurse! These red-headed people here ain't no coal miners."

"How about broncos?" asked Rainboldt. "Can't lay up with you a-tall unless I can earn my keep—and I'd sure like to stay here long enough to take a look at that old mountain. I can break bronc's."

"You're on."

"Home again!" said Dick. "What brand do you give?"

"Square and Compass. Some calls it the X Diamond X. Real malicious people call it the Pig-Pen brand. Come round on this side, and you'll see it on my horse's thigh. And there's my shack peeping up, the one nighest the Pass."

"Any of the old M T boys settled down here, maybe?"

Emil shook his head.

"Shucks! I was hoping there might be. I been working for the M T since I was knee-high to a hoppergrass. Good outfit."

"Wanted to get out and see the world?"

"No-o, not exactly. You see, I didn't think they done me just right. They stopped my pay, they took my mount away from me, and they barred me from the chuck wagon. Then I got mad and quit. Yes, sir, quit 'em cold!"

"Don't blame you one bit!" said Emil warmly.

"There was something said about a yearling, I believe. And the young gentleman that said it, I never had liked his nose. So I fixed it. He was the Old Man's nephew—is yet.

Then I borrowed his gun, too, a little later—five or ten seconds, say. I think maybe that had something to do with the Old Man treating me the way he did. I kind of hate it, too," Dick confessed soberly. "You don't find many like the Old Man. Sometimes I almost wish the Old Man had been an only child."

CHAPTER XXIV

LAND OF AFTERNOON

"But, lovely lady, dear, you simply must make a choice," expostulated Pierre Hines, with the firm emphasis of one who voices a finality. He lay on his back in the short yellow turf, his hands clasped behind his head. "The girls are willing you should have your pick—stranger within the gates, hospitable rites, that sort of thing—but you're overdoing it, really. They've been wonderfully nice to you. Strangely so, I thought at first. But calm reflection shows me the reason. We're such a fine bunch that any one of us—— Judy, you're not listening!"

"Oh-h!" breathed Miss Elliott. She sat up in the hammock. White forms flashed swallow-swift on the court below, a white ball shot back and forth across the net. The girl's dusky face sparkled, her eyes snapped with excitement, as she followed the ball. The rally ended. "Oh!" she said again. "Poor old Billy! He tried so hard for that point! It's a shame!" She cuddled back in her cushions and retrieved a silken ankle.

"Fifteen-forty. If Alf wins this it will be game and set," said Dowlin, unemotional, massive and blond, camped cross-legged on a boulder at Miss Elliott's feet. "But he hasn't won it yet. Billy always plays his best when he has to."

The tennis court was terraced at the base of a little natural ampitheater. The hammock swung beneath two chance junipers on the hillside; beyond the court flaunted a gay *marquée,* crowded with joy and laughter. Clustered homes of "Chatauqua," the North Side, the San Clemente of ease and of leisure, peeped from subsidized greenery roundabout; business San Clemente huddled along the narrow cañon below; work-

ing San Clemente—stone, adobe and box-house—straggled on the southern hillside, where deep-cut wagon roads twisted and turned to the widely scattered mines on the long slopes. Far above, the golden crest of Fantasia Mountain overhung them all.

"Thirty-forty!" Miss Elliott clutched the edges of the hammock and chanted under her breath. "Go it, Willyum! Oh, it's a fault! Dear, dear!"

"Yes, yes; what is it?" said Hines soothingly.

"Shut up, will you? Oh, it's a beaut! He was expecting a slow one for the second serve. Back, Billy; back! Run up, Billy! Watch out! Oh, dear! Oh! A-h-h! *Deuce!*"

"Alf will hear you," said Dowlin mildly. "If he does, he may imagine that you want Billy to win. You're not allowed to talk to the ball, or to influence it in any way. Be calm!"

"You can't stop her, Ed. She always unburdens her mind. It is that precaution which inspired the simple villagers to call her 'Little Miss Fixit' before she had been here a week."

"They call you 'Pretty Pierre'!" retorted Miss Fixit. "Hush! I want to watch."

"Judith Elliott!" said Pierre severely. "Pay attention to me! Leave that silly game alone, will you? I am urging you, aiding you, to make a wise decision; a quick one, anyhow. You owe it to us—to me. Those nice Danish girls at the Memphis mine, now, the little one in particular—Elsa, the one with the flaxy hair and the slate-colored eyes with little gold flecks in 'em—say, Ju, that child is a wiz! If you're really going to turn me down, make it a quick one. Little Elsa——"

"'Vantage, by heck!" said Dowlin. "Old Bill will pull it off yet!"

"Did you say specs?" asked Miss Elliott sweetly. "Eyeglasses?"

"Flecks. Not spec's. Little gold flecks—little gold devils—makin' a bally fool of a fellow."

"Good for Bill! He made it!" cried Miss Elliott.

"One set each," said Dowlin. "Now for the rubber."

"Ed," said Hines reproachfully, "you chatter too much. Be quiet, won't you. I would speak wingéd words to this scornful lady."

"If you ask me," said Judith, "I think that Watterson boy

can put it all over Billy at tennis. I only saw him play once —the terrible day that poor old Van was murdered. But he played like a fiend. We must try him out when he gets back from the ranch."

"Miss Judith," said Pierre earnestly, "leave the boy alone. You try out too many of us. Sometimes I think that you do not appreciate your privileges. Here you have practically all the Emerged Tenth on the waiting list; all the men that count, or that have anything much to count; the Tired Business Man, the Retired Ditto, the Only Son, the Flanneled Fool, and others too humorous to mention. Also Edward Dowlin, here present, otherwise known as the Abysmal Brute or the Blond Beast . . . and me! Choose, be-yutiful stranger, choose! Do it now!"

"Flanneled yourself!" said the beautiful stranger.

"'Flanneled'? Me? Madam, I would have you to distinctly wot——"

"To deliberately split an infinitive," said Miss Elliott coldly, "is to wantonly imperil your soul. It is almost as bad as to profanely swear."

"Coises!" Pierre clutched at his heart. "Woman! False and fatal beauty! I would have you know that I am always fitly apparreled to suit the occasion. Correct attire is my one hobby."

"Like the farmer with one besetting hen?" suggested Judith.

"Cruel and unkind! You could always be proud of my clothes, at least. It would serve you right if you married a common workingman! But no, I forgive you. Forget them hasty woids. And I beseech you, child, never make that mistake! Shun, oh shun, the man who works! Work is a sucker's game. No one ever makes any money until he has abandoned that disgusting habit!"

"Idiot!" said Judith, dimpling with mirth.

"Ah, you may well blush! I have marked you, madam. I have seen you making eyes at the stage driver, at the assayer, even at the blacksmith! Men with no taste in dress whatever!"

"Blue overalls are always in fashion," observed the Abysmal Brute.

"Dowlin, you grow more garrulous daily. Check yourself.

I have warned you once already. And you quite miss the philosophy of dress. The white collar—the polished shoes—the spotless gloves—what are these for but to advertise to all that their owner is above the degrading necessity of work? When, added to this, one follows closely every detail of the changing fashion, it proclaims aloud that one is——"

"Cut out the swear words, Pierre," advised Miss Judith, twinkling. "We know what you mean. We agree with you."

"——person of refinement, culchaw and intelligence. Like myself. Look at me! My enthusiasm prompts me to sit up. Pardon me!"

Pierre sat up, his Norman hawk's face sparkling with that enthusiasm; he brushed back his blond pompadour with slim fingers. "When corded vests are the thing, my vests are corded; when fashion says detachable cuffs, undetachable cuffs, or non-undetachable cuffs, I am in line. My galluses——"

"Pierre Hines!"

"Well, then!—The roll of a coat, one button, two or three; the curve or width of a hat-brim; the peg-top, the straight-front; if you want to know what's what, watch me. Or Alf."

"Alf is barred out," said the Abysmal Brute mildly. "I draw the line somewhere. Alf is hereby black-balled."

"Good! Now we're making progress," gloated Pierre. "Not to be outdone in generosity, I'll eliminate the Only Son. I'll tell you what, Ed: don't you give me away, and I won't tell on you. But we'll both give absent treatment to the absent, all except Charming Billy. Then I'll draw straws with you to see who fights it out with Billy. We won't leave it with Miss Elliott, of course. That wouldn't be fair. Let chance decide it. Winner to catch hands with Billy, dance round Miss Judy—discreetly—and sing:

Oranges and lemons,
The Bells of Saint Clemens!

Then she can guess. Let us hope she doesn't get a lemon."

Billy won a glorious victory; and Pierre Hines walked home with Miss Elliott.

"Judith," he said at the gate, "I want to tell you something." He hesitated a moment. Then he shrugged his shoulders, Spanish fashion. "You'll think I'm a conceited ass—at first—but I'm not, really. You'll see, when you think it over. Not in this case, anyhow. But I do think you ought to know what it was that I didn't want Ed to give away on me."

"What is it, Pretty—murder?"

"Worse than that," said Hines cheerfully. "Lungs. My father had 'em. So now you know why I rattle on so. Like a boy whistlin' in the dark."

"Perry! And I never guessed."

"You wouldn't. I've been out here four years. Good old climate has patched me up till I can almost pass for a man. Sounds like whimperin', doesn't it? It's not so bad as it seems, though—honestly it isn't. But I haven't the brains for head work, you see, or maybe I've only got too much money. It's only fair that I should envy—— Lord, Judy, there isn't a miner or a freighter that I don't envy! I don't count. There, damn it, this is exactly what I didn't want to say or sing or snivel, not on a bet. Makin' a pitiful donkey of myself!"

"You're not, you're not! Are you afraid, Perry—in the dark?"

Pretty Pierre threw his shoulders back and snapped his fingers.

"Not that much—not a scare! You remember that wise saying of Mark Twain's: 'How hard it is that we have to die—a strange complaint to come from the mouths of people who have had to live.'" Then he made a wry face. "I'll be honest with you, kid. We talk a heap of drivel, Judy, you and I, especially you—but I know you've got good hard sense behind the fluff, and you won't misunderstand.—Not a bit scared. But gee, kid, it's lonesome—in the dark! I gotta keep a-whistlin'!"

CHAPTER XXV

EARLY HISTORY OF A DOLLAR

"Dick, you don't have to keep working all the time," said Emil James. "You got them three broncos pretty well gentled. That entitles you to the eats for quite some time. You don't manage more'n two or three pounds of steak at a meal, anyway. Regular canary bird, you are. What say we play Sunday for a while?"

"Right as rain," said Dick. "Those bronc's are getting drawed, anyhow. Couple days' rest won't hurt 'em. I'll handle 'em a little night and mornin', so they don't forget. They sure like to be rubbed and curried!"

"I'm going over to town. Want to side me?"

"Not to-day. I'll get old Wiseman and shoe him," said Dick. "This evening I'm going up in the high country. It looks mighty cool and pleasant there, when the cliffs begin to shade this side. I've been wanting to go look, but not bad enough to ride any wild horses up there, thank you. I'll ride a bronc over to town to-morrow, and buy myself some duds."

"You're surely one wolf for dollin' up," observed Emil. "You've been washing on what clothes you've got ever since you came. So-long!"

Mid-afternoon found Dick creeping in the cool shadows of the central peaks. He rode slowly; he walked at the steep pitches, up or down; he made wary choice from the branching trails that twisted along the boulder-strewn hillside. A little bunch of deer bounded down the hill and disappeared. Dick had brought no gun because of the weight in the hard climbing. "Besides," he confided to Wiseman, "these may be a law on them, or something."

Dick looked out across the wide, dim plain, now far and far

below; his eye strained upward to the slender gleaming pinnacles at whose base he rode, and the greater peaks to southward, looming now to incredible beauty through the misty shadows. Red blossoms of *ocatillo* and cacti flamed about him: and low, earth-clinging flowers, whose names he did not know, peeped up through the grass; a bunch of wild phlox was knotted at his saddle-horn. For the horn-string was unused. Dick had left rope behind as well as gun, for the same weighty reasons. A cloth-covered canteen hung at the horn in the rope's place.

The way bent level before him; the reins were loose on Wiseman's neck; Dick raised his voice, full-throated, and woke the startled echoes:

"Oh, I'll drink and I'll gamble, I'll be gay again,
I'll ride the old fork-lip in the branding pen;
I'll rope 'em and throw 'em, and when they are tied
I'll stamp a big J B L on the left side."

His next attempt bespoke a desultory mind; skipping lightly across half a world and half a thousand years to a joyous and care-free refrain, high and quavering, from an alien tongue:

"How many pretty girls you have,
Girafla!—Giraflé!
How many pretty girls you have—
Love will take count of them!"

The stern mouth curved now to an unwonted smile, his face softened, musing on the sweet girl-mother—long and long ago —who had sung that old song so gayly.

He held that softened and better mood as he came to a wide and level shoulder of hill. He took off the bridle and left Wiseman munching the tender grasses; he looked across the deep blue valley intervening between these outlying peaks and the main range, a valley which culminated in a high and steep pass far to his right. He threw himself on the velvet turf and looked in silence. When his cigarette burned out, a fragment of another song—softly, now—rose unbidden to his lips:

"There are the good and blest,
Those I love most and best:
There, too, I soon shall rest——"

"Hi!" said a startled voice.

Rainboldt leaped to his feet and swept off his sombrero. Down the trail beyond him a young lady stepped briskly from between two mighty boulders; a young lady in riding attire, which was earth-stained and disheveled. She carried a slender wire-wound quirt of Mexican weave.

"Water, you were about to say? I'll get it for you," said Dick. "It's on my saddle. And you've had an accident? Not hurt, I hope?" He held out the canteen, first unscrewing the top.

"Thank you. No, I'm not hurt a bit. Except my feelings. They're ruined. If you'll excuse me, I'll drink first and tell you afterward. Dear me, what a very jerky conversation!"

"That's because I'm afraid—my part of it," said Dick gravely. "Not of you, you know. Of girls." He waved his hand to explain. "Any girls. All girls. And I suppose you're afraid of men. Girls are."

"Not!" supplemented the girl, and wrinkled her nose at him. Then: "Oh, my soul!" she sighed. "What would poor, dear mamma say if she knew I'd made a face at a perfect stranger?"

"Me, too," echoed Dick, mournfully sympathetic. "I never behaved this way before. I don't know what is getting to be the matter with me—unless, as Topsy said, it's my wicked heart. But my perfection was not shocked when you made the face. It was very effective. Not the nose so much—the dimples."

"Upon my word!" said the young lady.

"Why don't you drink? You must be thirsty."

"Look the other way, then, I haven't learned to drink from a canteen yet—not gracefully."

Dick looked the other way. "Why, drinking from a canteen is easy," he said. "The first rule is, you mustn't laugh——"

The girl laughed promptly, with disastrous results. There was a sound of spluttering and gurgling and of splashing

water. "There! See what you've done! You made me choke myself—you made me spill it!"

"I didn't want to do it," observed Dick, with a decidedly musical effect.

The young lady shot a suspicious glance at him, and frowned slightly; but the young man's eyes were fixed on a distant hill with a gaze so innocent, so guileless, and so unswervingly straightforward that she broke out into dimples again.

"That wasn't a song, however it sounded," she remarked. "Now you keep still till I drink."

A brief interval followed.

"Now you may look," said the young lady.

Dick looked. He saw a slim and girlish form, a face glowing with youth and laughter, dark hair under the upturned sombrero.

"I said look, not stare."

"A wise man has stated that any man is entitled—without offense—to take two looks at any lady," said Dick firmly. "The first look, as an ordinary precaution, to avoid the possibility of collision; the second, of appreciation. I stand on my rights."

"Try the profile," advised the young lady, and immediately made herself wooden, with outstretched fingers and awkward arms.

"Stop! You're turning into a Dutch doll! Here, you want to rest. Wait a bit. My saddle blanket is clean. I'll get it for you." He brought the blanket, a thick Navajo, and folded it; the young lady sat down obediently. Dick returned, carrying the saddle. "Here is my card," he said sedately, and laid his finger on a silver oval on the saddle fork.

"Richard Rainboldt." The girl read the engraved name; she rose and bobbed a curtsy. "I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Rainboldt. I am Judith Elliott, of San Clemente."

Dick bowed gravely. "Miss Elliott!" he murmured. "*So* pleased!" As the girl resumed her seat on the Navajo, he added:

"But San Clemente is not your home?"

"Oh, no! I've only been there a month. I am visiting my cousins, the Armstrongs. Do you know them?"

Dick shook his head. "I only came here a week ago, and I

haven't been over to San Clemente yet. You're an old-timer, compared with me. But about your accident? I suppose your horse is not close by, or you would have sent me after him at once. Is he hurt?"

"He fell down and got loose, and ran away. 'Pride goeth before destruction and an haughty spirit before a fall.' They warned me not to attempt this trail. I came through that little gap you see there." She pointed back to the high notch in the southwest.

"Some trip for a girl to make, alone, and her a newcomer," said Rainboldt, with warm admiration in his voice. "Haughty spirit is right, I guess. But they shouldn't have let you come."

Miss Elliott turned her unrepentant head.

"They don't know. I started as if I were going on the other side, and slipped round camp quietly. I was visiting at Van Patten's camp, you know."

"I don't know anything," said Dick. "I'm but a stranger here—as I was just observing when you arrived. Heaven is my home."

"Well," said Miss Elliott, "Van Patten's is a sort of a summer camp—more like a club house. Beautiful place. It is almost at the top of the gap on the other side, but there's a wagon road blasted out to it. I knew people came this way sometimes. So I came. I was over all the worst, too, when that horse, that——"

"Tormented?" suggested Dick.

"Thank you. When that tormented horse stumbled and rolled downhill. Not stumbled and rolled exactly—he slipped on a smooth stretch of rock and slid downhill. I held to the rein, but he jerked away and ran—oh, dear, you never saw anything like it!"

"If he went back to camp, your friends will be dreadfully alarmed."

"He didn't. He went straight down the mountain, clear to the foot, in a cloud of dust. He started a big boulder to rolling as he got up, poor dear!" said Miss Elliott, relenting. "I suppose that scared him and made him run, and his running started more boulders and little rocks, and that made him run faster, and so he started more rolling stones, and so on and

on and on. 'Twas a grand spectacle. But oh and ah! . . . 'How different from the home life of our own dear queen!' as the English lady said."

"How far back was this?"

Miss Elliott pointed. "About two miles, I guess."

"But why didn't you go back?"

"I had started to come this way," said Miss Elliott rebelliously.

Mr. Rainboldt gazed at her with marked respect.

"You shall do that little thing," he declared seriously. "You can take old Wiseman, when you're rested. I'll trot alongside to fetch him back. And your horse will be all right. He'll stop with a bunch of saddle horses, and they'll get him at some of the ranches."

"Where are the ranches?" demanded Miss Elliott.

"Why, haven't you seen them? Look right at the very foot of the main hill—look close. You can see three from here. Watch for the bright green—that's the cottonwoods. Then you can see the houses and corrals close beside."

"Oh-h!" said Miss Elliott, and her eyes widened. "Why-y! The trees look like little green feathers, and the corrals—why, they look like little work-baskets!"

"They've a right to look small. I reckon they're a good half mile straight down, or near it."

"This is the life!" said Miss Elliott cheerfully. "But I haven't thanked you for your kind offer to take me home—which is hereby gratefully accepted. Only for my high heels, though, I'd go on foot, in the spirit of the Dutch miner who wasted his substance in riotous living and walked home in the dust behind the wagon—you know the story, perhaps?"

"Yes. He made use of an expression. He said: 'Walk, you expressioned Dutchman—walk! Walk—expression—walk!"

Miss Judith nodded vigorously. "That's the way I felt. For I should have ridden round above that bad place. It was absolutely glassy. I knew at the time that I was taking a chance, but I was too lazy to make the detour. But, dear me, perhaps I am keeping you from your business—your work?"

"On the contrary, dear me, I have not a single business on hand. I came up here for a look-see—strictly for pleasure."

"Oh, Mr. Rainboldt—and I've spoiled it!"

"I hadn't thought of it in that light exactly," said Mr. Rainboldt.

Miss Elliott rose briskly. "Well, we'd better be going. I'm rested now. Your boot heels are not much better for walking than mine are. Oh, the vanity of men!"

"Right about the vanity, but wrong in the application," said Dick, saddling up. "Cowmen need boot heels in their business. I'll tell you as we go along."

But he did not tell her about boot heels. They traveled single file along the rough trail, with only a word of caution or encouragement flung back over Dick's shoulder for all conversation. When they came to better going, as they neared San Clemente Pass, Dick fell back and walked beside with a hand in Wiseman's mane. The lady was preoccupied; a little V-shaped wrinkle appeared between her black brows.

"There's where I'm staying—with Emil James," said Dick, as they drew even with the Square and Compass ranch."

"Yes, I know Mr. James," said Judith absently. The young man was quick to sense some unexplained change from their former sprightly footing. It was the girl who spoke first.

"You won't have to take me to town, Mr. Rainboldt," she said. "I've just remembered that the stage—the buckboard that carries the mail, I mean—gets to San Clemente between six and seven. I can wait at the Gap and take that. Then you won't have so far to walk."

"Why, I'd just as lief take you all the way, Miss Elliott."

"It will not be necessary, thank you."

Rainboldt shrugged his shoulders.

"You're the doctor. We won't have to wait long. I've seen the mail outfit coming for half an hour."

"Where?"

Dick pointed.

"See it? Crawling along up the third little ridge? No—here, coming from the southeast."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I was hoping you wouldn't think of it," said Dick truthfully.

The young lady made no response to this little remark. Her face glowed like a ruby in the sun. When the blush died away

she knitted her brows again, as in some perplexity; seeing which, Dick strode on ahead, swinging swiftly down the last easy slope.

Their trail came out in the highest point in San Clemente Gap, barely wide enough, here, for the wagon road. Judith dismounted and patted Wiseman's friendly nose.

"Tired?" said Dick sympathetically.

"Oh, no! You must be, though," said the girl. But she seemed ill at ease.

"How are the strikers coming on?" asked Dick, in a perfunctory attempt to make conversation. "Will they win out, do you think?"

"Oh, dear me, I don't know," said Judith irritably. "Mr. Spencer is going to have men from the outside. Some of them have come already, and we're afraid there'll be trouble. I don't know the rights of it. I'm prejudiced, I guess. My father owns stock in the mine, and so does Uncle Jim. He owns a lot. Uncle Jim is J. C. Armstrong, you know."

"No, I don't know any one on the west side."

"The stage is nearly here," said Judith.

"Oh, it will be ten minutes yet. They have to stop and rest coming up this steep hill."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Rainboldt. You have been very kind." She held out her hand.

In speechless wrath and astonishment Rainboldt saw that she was offering him a silver dollar. He bent his head with an exaggerated air of humility and gratitude. "Oh, *thank* you!" he said sweetly. He took the coin and flung it away with a quick jerk of the wrist, as though it had been white-hot. It flashed in the sunlight; it sailed above the *ocatillo* bushes and fell in a bushy-topped cedar far below. Good-day!"

"Oh!" said Judith faintly.

He took off his hat, bowed low, swung into the saddle and whirled down the hill at a brisk trot, bolt upright, his hat tip-tilted. The stage toiled up the slope.

"Oh, Mr. Rainboldt! Come back! Oh, I'm sorry! I didn't know!" Judith was fairly running after him at the last words; her voice rose as she ran. Too late she realized the full enor-

mity of her offense. She stopped with one hand on her breast and called imploringly to Rainboldt's implacable back:

"Come back! *Please,* Mr. Rainboldt!"

Rainboldt rode on.

A vagrant tear splashed down her flushed cheek. She turned her small face toward San Clemente and set out resolutely; she clicked her small teeth together.

"Walk, damn you, walk!" said Judith.

CHAPTER XXVI

TINTED NEWS

Mr. Alfred Spencer, manager of the Torpedo mine, sat in his room and perused a bulky letter which had reached him by the last mail. He read it attentively, looking up from time to time. His teeth, in the lamplight, were bared in that false and sinister smile which went so far to make him unbeloved.

The letter was interesting as to matter: the date-mark was El Paso, the writer was that Parker who had been rechristened as "Snipes" by Mr. Crooknose Evans, and the letter recounted at length the recent exploits of Mr. Evans in El Paso. The story will look over Mr. Spencer's shoulder at the last paragraphs.

"Well, all at once, the Crooknose guy escapes from the hospital. Supposed to be hardly able to get about. Police offer five hundred reward: but to my notion they don't want him. Bought off, maybe. Anyhow, there's some damn hocus-pocus about it. This cop, Gannon, he had a crush on Crooknose, being in the big fight with him and all. But Travesy, he wants him and he wants him bad. He's on the peck, bigger than a wolf. And he offers two thousand for him, cold cash. Nice piece of money, what?

"Well, sir, I believe you and me can get it. I haven't let on, but I kept my ears open. The girl's father come down and took her home: and it seems he is from your burg—name of Quinn—little sawed-off Irish red-head. There was a young fellow with him—uppity chap named Murray—looked like a half-breed and acted like he was a king or something—sassy as hell. And there was another guy, a regular high-roller—bad man, I guess—that had been down here hitting the high

places for some time before ever the Crooknose guy blowed in. And look you, he was one of your people too—Steve Thompson. You must surely know him: every one in this damn town knows him, and they all shine up to him like he was the gate-keeper in heaven, and they was tryin' to work him for a rain-check.—Well, sir, them two, Murray and Thompson—they disappeared the same time that Mr. Smart Alec Crooknose did. Got that? They didn't go by rail, I'm sure of that. My notion is that they went to your corner, cross-country.

"I bet you can locate him. If you can, tell me and I'll tell Travesy. We'll split 50-50. No, I won't double-cross you. No, you won't double-cross me. Damn you, you dassent—I can hang you, and you jolly well know it.

Let me hear from you P. D. Q."

Yours for the stuff,

WM. PARKER.

As Mr. Alfred Spencer considered his reply, that ominous smile of his grew positively alarming. He was not in the confidence of San Clemente, as a usual thing; but even the baser sort of San Clemente had thought of this affair of little Katie Quinn's as a thing apart from all ordinary rules and cautions: had been loose-tongued accordingly. Therefore, a fairly accurate version of Katie's peril and rescue had drifted to Spencer's ears.—There had been also a rumor of a covered spring wagon, creeping by slow stages up the inland valleys beyond the Black Range. That slow journey had ended at Fuentes town: and those leisurely wayfarers had been three—Billy Murray, Steve Thompson and a stranger who gave his name as Lute Evans, or Luther Evans— a stranger with a crooked nose—a stranger very pale and feeble, as if he had been ill—or wounded perhaps. Mr. Spencer revolved these things in his mind. His lips parted in a crafty and cruel smile: he pulled paper to him and began to write.

"Well, J. C., you came at last," said Mendenhall heartily. "This is the third day I've met the stage for you. Armstrong, you and I haven't always got along beautifully, but this is one time I'm glad to see you. This strike is getting my goat. I'm afraid we are going to have trouble. Can't

you come up to the office and make medicine? I'm uneasy in my mind. You can 'phone your missus, and I'll have supper sent over from the hotel."

"All right, Herman," said J. C., burly, square-jawed, bushy-browed. "What's it all about, anyhow?"

"Nothing, except what I wrote you—holding us up for more money. They're stubborn, or I am, or both. I really should have written before, I guess. I was hoping to get it settled without bothering you."

"What about insufficient timbering? I hear the men made a grievance of that, too."

Mendenhall brushed the query aside.

"Yes, they were right about that. We ran short and put in some pretty weak sticks in the stopes above the four-hundred-foot drift. I wanted to get the ore out to fill our contract, and 'twas safe enough for a few days. The new men are doing the job over now—part of 'em. I put the rest to driving the adit we started to drain the sump. Spencer and I talked it over and decided not to run a night shift yet. If any of the old men have a mind for violence, a night shift would give them their chance. They can't well do dirty work in daytime in full sight of town. It's too expensive to keep the pumps going without a full crew on the job, so we thought we'd best rush the adit before the mine flooded. Don't go so fast, J. C.; you're forgetting my game leg."

"Did they misuse the Mexicans you hired?"

"Why, no, I don't believe they did," said Mendenhall with eager generosity. "Mostly hard words, I guess; maybe a little hustling—nothing to hurt. But they used mighty rough talk to Spencer, too. That made it hard for me. I can't very well go back on my superintendent. If they had come to me first, J. C., I might have given them the extra half-dollar temporarily, till the directors could meet and decide what to do. I wanted to keep the mine running. But I couldn't go over Spencer's head, could I now?"

"No," said Armstrong, frowning. "Think the labor unions didn't send a man here to stir up the trouble?"

"I hardly believe so. They just took a fancy for four dollars per. No mine has ever paid that in San Clemente. I don't know why they picked on us. Gosh, I'd hate to

knuckle down to 'em, though of course the directors may decide to do it. On the other hand, we've had the old push with us from the first—and I liked the old boys, J. C."

"That they've been with us from the first is exactly what makes this crack mighty nearly unforgivable," said J. C. "If they wanted an advance, they should have asked for it like men, and kept on to work till we had time to think it over, at least."

"Shucks, J. C., you mustn't expect too much of men like that, just ignorant old mossbacks. Their tongues are rough, but they're not badhearted. You must expect that sort to go off half-cocked once in a while. Like as not half of 'em are sorry now and would be glad to be on the job again."

"They'll get the chance," said the other grimly, "if they go to work at the old scale. Then if they have any proposition to make we'll consider it—and not till then."

"That's the way I hoped you'd see it. For if the directors give in, Spencer will have to go—me, too, probably. I hope they don't hold out so long that we can't get together. People say—I don't know how true it is—that the miners at the Memphis and the Bennett-Stephenson are giving up part of their wages to carry the strikers over. And the cowmen are eggin' 'em on."

"They'll give in or stay out for keeps. No man can tell me how to run my business," said Armstrong.

Mendenhall, lagging behind on the steep trail, permitted a malicious bleam of amusement to flicker in his eyes.

"You're walking me off my feet with this pesky limp of mine," he said. "Slow up, and cool off. I was pretty hot myself, at first. Reckon I'm getting patient in my old age, for I'm trying to see both sides. There's another thing, J. C.; serious, too. This new outfit I shipped in from outside looks like they might be ugly customers. They're rubbin' it over on the old hands something scandalous. Spencer tries to hold 'em down; but they drink a good deal. Strike or no strike, I'd hate to see any of the old gang get in bad or get hurt. Only for that I would have had in a full crew before now. But this new bunch are bad *hombres*. Old strike-breakers, you know. They look tough to me. Their ringleader, in particular, Clay Connor, he's a regular wolf. More than one

of 'em are gunmen, I judge. And they don't break rocks for shucks, and they're insubordinate, and they're costing us like hell—to say nothing of the risk of bloodshed."

"If there's any bloodshed or destructioon of property, the old crowd is out for keeps—if the mine goes bust on it," said Armstrong.

"Easy all, J. C! If the newcomers start it, you wouldn't bar out the old boys? A man's got a right to defend himself, I suppose, even if he is a striker."

"Oh, I suppose so—if we knew who started it. Nobody ever started a shooting scrape, to hear them tell it."

"That's right, too. How does this hit you, J. C.? Let's rush that drain right through so the mine don't flood—all of us sittin' on the lid—and then ship out the newcomers and shut down the mine till the strikers come to our terms, hey?"

"That's the caper. Freezeout."

"Freezeout it is. We can rush that adit through to the water in another week. Then we'll all be hunky, if the strikers don't get to hittin' up the booze. I'll say this for them, J. C.; they're well led or well advised. They've held in and stood for a good deal of insultin' talk these last few days. Hope they can keep it up. Say, J. C., if they were to blow up the pumps on us before we got our drain finished, it would put a crimp in us for fair, wouldn't it? Well, here we are. You go in the office. I've got a bottle of fine old Pontecanet in the cooler. I'll get that. Then we'll 'phone for supper and discuss ways and means."

As Mendenhall opened the refrigerator, Clem Gray came out of the assayer's office and joined him.

"What does he say, Uncle Hermann?" he whispered.

"Got him!" said Mendenhall blithely. "Swallowed it, hook, bob and sinker! Pompous old ass!"

Six men filed into Armstrong's gate next day—Corwen, Pendravis, Price, Owens, Murtha and Wigfall. Armstrong came out to meet them. He waited on the walk below the piazza and held up a forbidding hand.

"If you are here as individuals, as my old friends and neighbors—come in! If you come as any kind of delegation or committee from your ungrateful union, go back the way

you came!" His bushy brows were knotted to bristling tufts, his square, smooth face was red with anger.

The miners came to a halt, jostling together awkwardly. Old Sam Wigfall stepped forward a pace.

"Happen we moight have a word with 'ee, friendly loike," he said. "We want nowt beyond reason."

"Go back to your work. Then if you have any complaint to make, I'll listen."

"But they timbers, J. C.! Look for thysen—wast moiner or e'er tha' wast maister."

"Go back to work!" boomed Armstrong. "I'll not hear a word!"

Old Wigfall advanced another step. His eyes blazed wrath.

"Maister or no, shalt not roar me doon! Give ower thy bull-bellowing! Art but a man for all—and no man can daunt me wi' black looks! Hear me now!"

"Do you threaten me?"

"Yaas, bai Gawd! bawled the old miner.

They faced each other, glaring and quivering. Then old Sam brought his voice down with an effort. "Taper off a bit, J. C., and oi will do the same. Angry words are half meant. Happen tha' didna mean the full of thy own words, beloike. Coom! We'll make'ee an offer. Do'ee pick three moiners—the managers, if tha' loike—from the Merlin, the Modoc and the Memphis. If nobbut one of three say that Gallery Foar or Gallery Two the Foar Hunnerd Drift be saife—they're the worst—why, we'll go back to wor-rk. Speak up, men, wilt stand by my offer?"

"That's roight," growled Pendravis. "Us'll bide bai that wor-rd, one and all."

"Do'ee goa thysen, J. C.," urged Blacky Corwen. "Thou'rt better moiner nor any of they manager men on t' hill."

"No man shall tell me how to run my business," said J. C. doggedly. "Go back to your work. When you do that, I may hear what you have to say—not till then. That's my last word to you!"

"Do 'ee hear this wor-rud then!" Old Wigfall went through the motion of washing his hands; he shook invisible drops from his fingers. "We havena lot or part in 'ee! If tha' sends flesh and blood again to yonder man-trap, art no better nor a murderer—and a murderer for siller! Go thy ways to hell!"

CHAPTER XXVII

MEN OF HARLECH

It is well known that the best tunes are in the devil's service. The devil is well served in other ways. Saloons, now; all that has been sung or said in dispraise of saloons is here fervently indorsed. Yet notice how effectively the deputy plays upon the passionate preference for the undecorative which marks the uncultured male. There is room and sea way, walls and floor are uncluttered by frippery, shrubbery, curlicues, lace and gossamer, mystery, concealment and junk.

John's room—John's ideal room, the den of his dreams—is high and sunny and bare. One door and much light, one table and two chairs, real fireplace and real wood, ash tray and waste-basket, an unfringed rug of solid warm color—everything may be seen at a glance. On the wall are maps of far places, Arabia and the East Indies, a shelf for the Six Best Books. No drawn work, no diaphaniety, no cushions, nothing too fine for use, nothing to live up to, no formulas for compliance withal. An ideal only; with the best motives, John's womankind tenderly persist in making him comfortable. So John goes hence to rest his poor head from the overwhelmingness of personal property; far from the maddening formula, to where he may be unfeignedly Johnsome, and not a poor imitation of James, living according to the conscience of his own dictator.

The above is in no sense a criticism; merely dispassionate comment. We all and necessarily accept woman as she is. She always was.

The business place of Trevennick & Nagel, in San Clemente, is fashioned in deference to John's views, high, wide and handsome. Here no John is required to be Jimsome,

or contrariwise. It is fully recognized at this business center that you are you and that I am I, and that there are still others entirely distinct from either of us. There is no effort to make anyone look, act, be and feel like a composite photographed—retouched—of these several poor kinds of people. Thus freed from the strain and vigilance of ceaseless effort to be someone else, the John mind relaxes; a lively sense of well-being, ease and pleasant cheer suffuses his rosy limbs.

Nagal too—the Noisy Partner, as distinguished from Joe Trevennick, the Silent Partner—Nagel was a distinct influence. Nagel had only a part of a piece of one lung, and each hour's life was an independent miracle. Authority had given him six weeks at best—four years earlier. Having put by the hopes of this world, Nagel fronted the ills of life with a simple and light-hearted cheerfulness which was at once impressive, instructive and infectious. For very shame's sake we abandoned our petty, silly woe and grievance; the intolerable injury became a light matter.

Yes, Albert used you shabbily, no doubt. But perhaps he had his reasons. Come to think of it, didn't you treat Tommy quite as badly, long ago? Partly because you were a silly ass, that was; partly for the fell clutch of circumstance. Yet Tommy has forgiven you. Plainly, you must give Albert a good licking, or take one, and thereafter harbor no mallice. Who knows? perhaps Albert was also in the clutch of circumstance?

This Nagel—dead and dust long ago—is not forgetable, with his big eyes and the crooked smile under his incredibly long mustaches, his frail, thin hands, his cheerful croak and his invincible courage.

Business was thriving. The thick blurr of Cornish speech was in the air, the softer slurrings of Welsh. It was Saturday night, it was pay day at the Merlin and the Modoc; the big wages were all to spend. There was a fair attendance from the other mines, some even from the Bennett-Stephenson, five miles away—men who were single and optimistic (who were both single and optimistic, on reflection) and who anticipated benefits from the big wages. The Torpedoes were present in force, surly and silent, or speaking apart with friends from the other mines.

The strike-breakers attended in a body. Sixteen of them, big men all, they made a group apart, under the leadership of their smallest, bright-eyed Clay Connor. They drank deep and laughed loud; drinking only among themselves, perforce, except when Bates, a rat-faced stranger from the hotel, thumped the bar and called up all hands.

There were some half-dozen cowmen, including Emil James and Rainboldt. Dick was in no amiable mood, this being the day following his little trip to the high country. The north side of town was represented by "Charming Billy" Armstrong, quiet Ed Dowlin and Pierre Hines, who sat on a window ledge, observant; and the gathering was completed by a sprinkling of prospectors headed by old Pat Breen, a wizened and smiling little man with a record.

The Silent Partner worked double tides, ambidextrous to the needs of business, yet with a corner of an eye for Sam Barkeep. Sam Clemente was far afield; there, at least, cash registration had not yet cast an upas blight upon youthful enterprise. Nagel plucked a merry strain from a guitar. Then his eye singled out young Benjy Oram, of the Mormon.

"Up, Benjy!" called Nagel. "'Atta-boy!"

He threw his head up, he straightened himself in his chair, he swept the strings to a high and throbbing call. Young Benjy crossed to Nagel's chair; his strong young voice fell in with the crashing chords, thrilled and swelled to the strong barbaric cadences; the march of the Men of Harlech:

"Ni chaiff gelyn ladd ac ymlid,
Harlech! Harlech! cwyd iw herlid;
Y mae Rhoddwr mawr ein Rhyddid,
Yu rhoi nerth i ni;——"

Billy Armstrong was speaking with compassion of the Noisy Partner, when a voice split through the roaring mirth in front. It was not loud, but it made its way, tense and hateful. The mirth died down. Men stepped aside to the bar, the wall, leaving a clear lane through the place of business.

Two men stood out alone—Clay Connor, slight, panther-graceful, smiling, a beautiful devil, and young Benjy, the singer.

"Cut out that infernal caterwauling and clapper-clawing,

I say. That's no tongue for a white man to hear."

"'Tis a fine old ancient tongue," said sturdy Benjy. "And a noble song. Too good for the likes of you."

"I hear you say so."

"I am here to make it good," said Benjy. "Take off your coat and have it explained. I'm no gunman."

"And I'm no boy," said Connor, laughing lightly. "Not good enough, kid—I don't fight fistfights. A boy's game. You lick me to-day and I lick you to-morrow. Nothing settled. But I say again that your disemvoweled Taffy-talk song sounds like a pack of fire-crackers. And I'll back my words at any game where a man stays put."

Nagel strummed softly on the guitar, his chair tilted on two legs. Connor kept the tail of his eye on "Doc" Hughes, booted and spurred, half cowman, half miner, as the one most likely to take up the challenge. But it was Rainboldt who answered. His back was to the bar, his weight resting on both elbows, thrust behind him wingwise; one foot was on the floor, the boot heel of the other caught on the brass foot-rail—a picture of careless comfort. As he spoke he shifted his position ever so slightly so that his weight fell on the left elbow, leaving the right still touching the bar-top, but free.

"Do you know, Mr. Connor," said Dick evenly, "I quite agree with your views on fist-fighting. And I like your face. Any time you want to borrow trouble, your credit's good with me. As a linguist, however, your sentiments distress me."

"Good night, nurse!" said Emil James, and pushed himself forward to the open, his eyes upon Connor's adherents, now crowding to the fore.

"I love Welsh," said Dick. "I may be said to dote upon Welsh. Welsh is a language of singular beauty. It appeals to all that is highest and best in my nature. Tall talk will never turn me from it. Go on with your song, kid. I'll see to it that no one interrupts you."

Nagel's speech overlapped the last words. He plucked a wandering air from his guitar; a Spanish folk song with a recurring poignant phrase, a rising phrase, ever keener and more tense.

"Consider my case, now, you two gentlemen, before you

go into the matter further," said Nagel. There was that in his quiet voice for which they listened, Clay Connor crouching tiger-wise, Rainboldt leaning idly against the bar; listened each with eyes only for the other.

"Life isn't as good fun as when I was a boy," said Nagel pleasantly. "Sometimes I'm almost weary of dying on the installment plan. You want to bear that in mind. So I'm asking you gentlemen not to start any shooting to-night, please. It mars the furniture; it's bad for business; and it annoys me. I've got a sawed-off shotgun under the corner of the bar, nine buckshot to a load, two barrels, one barrel for each of you and no favorites played. If I get mine, why, that's so much clear gain. Only neither of you fellows want the name of snuffing out a wreck like me. 'Twould look ugly. Still, suit yourselves."

The guitar tinkled away, about moons and a dreamy wind now, violets, and the like of that. Some one sighed in the crowd by the wall. Rainboldt's blue eyes broke to a frosty twinkle.

"That will be enough for all practical purposes," he remarked thoughtfully. "Thank you, I don't wish any of the pie." He turned to the bar. "Drinks on the house, you!" he announced.

"Sure!" said Trevennick, and dispassionately twisted from Sam's hand certain coins which Sam was about to bestow upon himself. "Line up, gentlemen—name your poison."

It was a long sigh this time that went up from the roomful. Amid a general shuffling of feet and chairlegs, Connor held up his hand.

"Boys," he said, "I want you all to know that this stranger-man said exactly what I wanted to say, only I didn't have the nerve to say it—me being a newcomer and not much known here. It was clever of him and I am thankful for that same. Not to be wholly outdone in generosity, I will now take water. I hereby admit, avow, and proclaim that Welsh is the finest tongue the world knows—barrin' only the Irish, which is own cousin to it—and for the music mayhap it is even better than the Irish."

He turned to Dick curiously.

"You have my name, sir. Will you give me yours? Rain-

boldt?" He held out his hand. "I'm proud to know you, ye devil! But you're not Welsh—never a hair of you."

"No," said Rainboldt gravely. "I'm American, and I never breathed with soul so dead. But when I'm in Rome I like to ramble."

"You go too strong for me—you and friend music," said Connor frankly. "Come on, lads, we'll hear the rest of that song—and a rare fine one it is!" he laughed. "And there will be no more tall talk this night—not from me."

"Yuh damn hobgoblin!" said Emil James, when he and Dick had reached home. "You near started a riot."

"When I was a boy," explained Dick, "I had a pup that was a lineal descendant of Llewellyn's hound in the Fifth Reader. So I couldn't stand for no such break as that."

"Them Torpedoes and Modocs is suhtainly keepin' their heads," mused Emil. "That's the old hands holdin' the young devils back, or there'd sure be war. That Connor gang is sure obstreperous. Takin' mighty big chances, they are. I wouldn't have made that crack Connor did, not on a bet."

"Nor for wages?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Dick, "that this whole play these strike breakers make is too raw to be natural. If they are not pulling this rough stuff per instructions, I miss my guess."

"But—why?"

"That," said Dick, "is what I am going to study on, after I put out the light. Notice that man Bates who was settin' 'em up to the house so wild and fierce?"

"The hatchet-faced one? Yes!"

"Well," said Dick, "he didn't loosen up till the Torpedoes came. Then he limbered up and got in action like he was afraid of dying disgraced. But after Connor and me had our exchange of views the Torpedoes went home. Bates hung round, but he didn't buy—not after the Torpedoes went—not once. Notice that?"

"Humph!" said Emil James. He looked down his nose. "So he did!"

He blew out the light. Dick, wrestling with his problem, dropped off to a troubled sleep: and dreamed of a girl that glowed like a ruby in the sun.

THE BELLS OF SAINT CLEMENS

CHAPTER XXVIII

LITTLE BLACK TOODLES

"You may say what you like," said Billy firmly, "but I'll never marry a girl that won't speak to me. No, sir! I'd as soon marry you—or Judith. Don't say 'Hilda' to me!"

"What's the matter with us?" demanded Violet Armstrong tartly, from the porch steps.

"While I am no hardened moralist," said Pierre, in a shocked voice, "both of you, you know—really, Vi'let! It's—it's unusual!" Pierre lay on the grass with clasped hands behind his head and his eyes dreamed along the crest of La Fantasia.

"Oh, bother! Why shouldn't you marry one of us, William?"

"Cousins," said Billy briefly.

"Nonsense! I'm not your cousin," said Judith.

"Vi is my cousin and you're Vi's cousin. Same thing," said Billy heartlessly. "Sorry, and all that. But you see how it is."

"Billy Armstrong, you're horrid!" declared Violet. "Of all the stuck-up smarties! Charming Billy! William the Conqueror! Yah!"

"Hell hath no fury like a woman—quotation marks," said Pierre. "You've hurt their feelings, Billy."

"Vain Miss Violet!" mocked Billy, and lifted his voice in song:

"Vain Miss Violet, there she goes,
All dressed up in her Sunday clothes!"

"That's a pretty little thing, Armstrong. Why don't you have it set to music?"

"That's right, Mr. Dowlin. You stick up for us," purred Violet. "You're not my cousin, are you?"

"If you weren't my cousin, Ju," said Billy dreamily, "I might consider you. You're not so bad looking, you know."

"Yes, I know. And I don't have to depend altogether on my looks, either. There is always the Elliott Plow Works. It is one of my greatest charms.

"What care I how black I be,
Forty pounds shall marry me!
If forty won't, then fifty shall,
For I'm my daddy's bouncin' gal!"

"I'll tell you who'd be a good match for Judy," said Billy contemplatively. "The only man I know who might—possibly—manage her when she goes on these little tantrums, is that chap that called the plug-uglies last night."

"What was that, Billy?" asked Vi. "No trouble with the miners, I hope?"

"Nerviest thing I ever saw—and the silliest," said Pierre. "Heroic defense of the Welsh by a student of language and literature—man that never saw a harpoon. Disinterested devotion, I call it. Should be reported to Andrew Carnegie, the great medaler."

"But what's the story? We're all in the dark."

"Billy'll tell you. He talked to the Champion of Cymry all the rest of the evenin'. Thicker'n Damon and Charybdis, they were."

So Billy told the story, interrupted by many "Oh's!" and "Ah's!" "What was the chap's name, Hines?" he finished.

"I've forgotten."

"Rainboldt," said Ed Dowlin. "Dick Rainboldt."

"Gee!" said Judith. Her eyes grew big and round; her face burned.

"Another!" groaned Billy, in great disgust. "Lordy, look at her blushin'!"

"Where'd you meet him, Ju?" demanded Violet.

"Oh, I'm such a fool—such an unfortunate little fool!"

"Sounds interestin'," said Hines. "Make good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever. Tell it to us."

"The day my horse got away, I—I met him on the trail and we came—Oh, I can't! I'm ashamed!" said Judith, through her fingers.

"I see," said Pierre.

"'O stay,' the maiden said, 'and rest
Thy weary head upon this breast!'
Suspicion filmed that stranger's eye,
And to the maid he made reply,
'Excelsior?'"

"Beast! Pierre Hines, you're just horrid, so there! I won't tell you—I won't! It was awful—worse than anything I've ever done."

"It must have been awful," said Miss Violet. "Now, you've got to tell us."

"I—I——" began Judith wretchedly. "I——"

"Yes, you, you, certainly. Go on!" encouraged Billy. "Spare us the preliminaries. We've been through them—eh, Dowlin?"

"She makes dimples," said Dowlin dismally. "She looks down—up at the hills—and sideways, to get the range, and then she gives you a broadside all at once. It's fierce! Tell us, Judith; you might as well. Just give us the outlines. We can fill them in."

Judith buried her burning face in her arms; half sobbing, half laughing, she blurted out the shameful story of Dick Rainboldt and the tip.

"Gabriel's trump, and it doubled!" said Pierre.

"Rather!" said Dowlin, and whistled in his teeth.

Billy groaned.

"I told you all the time how it would be," he said in a weary and discouraged voice. "The cow has eaten the grindstone at last!"

There was a heavy silence. Judith peeped out timidly from her shelter. Miss Armstrong stared at her in unassumed horror. Billy supported his chin with both hands, with hopeless, unseeing eyes upon the far peaks of Fantasia Mountain.

Pierre clung blindly to the corner post of the piazza, wrestling with some great emotion. She turned to Ed Dowlin, to find his honest blue eyes filled with a pity so obviously sincere that she abandoned half-measures and wept openly.

"You inhuman idiot!" said Miss Armstrong. "Howl, you miserable creature, howl! Serves you right!"

"So kind of you, Sir Walter," observed Billy in a mincing voice. " 'Here's a quarter for you. Railleh, Mr. Du Guesclin, I find I have forgotten my purse.' O, Lord!"

Judith wailed afresh.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! I'm so ashamed! I—I never knew any working men. I didn't kno-ow!"

"Rot!" said Billy brutally. "Come off that stuff! Your dad was a working man—is yet. If he could have had his way you'd have been brought up as an American girl. Aunt Jo always tried to be snobby. Snivel now, do! You've jolly well got a good right to—go to it!"

"Come, 'Miss Elliott, it isn't so bad as all that," said Dowlin. "You can make it right with him, you know. Cheer up!"

"Oh, do you think so?" Judith put out a hand to him. "I'll apologize, of course, if that will do any good."

"Apologize? You want to crawl!" said Violet. "You want to grovel!"

"Offer to do his washing," advised Billy. "That is the only thing I can think of that will square you properly."

"I am submerged in gloom, black as the night which covered Mr. Henley from pole to pole," said Pierre. He rolled over with his face in the grass and gave himself up to unseemly mirth.

"Pierre Hines!" Judith sprang to her feet with flashing eyes. "If you dare laugh at me while I'm in such tr-rouble, I'll never speak to you again! I'm going to grovel! I know where Mr. Rainboldt lives—just over the divide, at the James ranch. I'll go now. I'll bring him back with me. Billy, you saddle Nibbles for me while I change."

"I say, don't wash off the tearstains, Ju. That'll fetch him. You look rippin'!" said Billy.

"Imbecile!" said Judith, and disappeared.

"I haven't laughed so much since Uncle Jim died," declared Pierre.

"Well, she got hers! Did you ever hear the like of that caper?" demanded Miss Violet inelegantly. "We certainly punished that young lady for fair. All her mother's fault, too. Hope we didn't rumple her precious feelings too much. I'll run upstairs and smooth her down a little before she goes."

"Women," said Billy in great disgust, "are all alike. Vi has gone to help Judith get her war paint on. Poor Rainboldt!"

Judith flashed through the gate a little later, waving a gay farewell to Violet and the three young men. Sabbath chimes tossed mellow from the towers of San Clemente church as she clattered up the stony road.

"The Bells of Saint Clemens!" said Pierre soberly. "You 'member what I said at the tennis match, Dowlin? She's makin' her choice right now—little Judy!

'Que t'as de belles filles,
L'Amour les comptera!'

"I'm a seventh son of a calamity howler, and I want to put my prophecy on record—little Judy is a goner!"

Charming Billy watched until Judith was a speck in the distance. He put out one hand to Dowlin and one to Violet.

"She isn't my cousin," he said, in a wretched little whimper. "I want my little black Toodles!"

CHAPTER XXIX

FORGIVE

Mr. Dick Rainboldt, being minded to teach to the Stargazer bronco the beginnings of his duty, found a bunch of cattle upon a stony hillside, with an unbranded calf of their number, a "short yearling," appertaining to Emil James. He hustled the bunch down to a sandy draw, where no harm might befall calf or horse; and there he closed in with a whirling loop, scattering the bellowing tailenders. The calf was swift, but studious Stargazer was swifter; there was a skillful cast of the loop, and the long-ear pitched and bawled at the rope's end. At his end of the rope Stargazer did a few spectacular bounds on his own account; but Rainboldt soothed him with voice and hand, and mysteriously contrived to avoid entanglement in the rope.

The bunch swept on. The yearling came to a momentary halt. Dick touched Stargazer with the spur, and, as the horse darted forward, he twitched the slack so that the yearling crossed it. At the same time he reined Stargazer to his haunches; the long-ear executed a creditable somersault. Dick jumped off, he knotted the bridle rein deftly to the rope; he raced swiftly to the calf, tugging at the tie-string round his waist as he ran.

The yearling rose before Dick was halfway down the rope; he gave a heart-chilling battle cry, and made straight for his persecutor. Dick leaped aside. Stargazer tried to run. Horse and long-ear crossed the rope in opposite directions and both were thrown to the ground. As the yearling fell, the cowboy pounced upon him, gathered the frenzy-beating feet together with a swoop of legs and arms, made a few quick passes and rose. The captive was hog-tied. Dick threw off the choking neck-rope.

Stargazer scrambled to his feet, terrified; he decided to go away, but the bridle reins were tied fast and Dick was at the other end of the rope, with his heels plowing in the sand. Stargazer came to a halt, snorting; calling softly as he drew near, Dick came up the rope, coiling it as he came. He untied the reins, patted Stargazer's quivering muzzle, and put foot to stirrup.

It was time. The long-ear, madly threshing his head, bawled frantic terror and indignation. Down the draw, at this piteous outcry, a furious cow reappeared, prompted by maternal affection. She was too near for comfort. Stargazer whirled, plunging. Rainboldt slid into the saddle; he whirled his rope and shouted. The cow charged in a fine frenzy, head down, tail up, vociferous. Rainboldt strove vainly to turn her with shout and onsweep. Her blood was up; she held the right of way. Slipping aside, Dick fell in behind her and drew up close beside. The circling rope poised rhythmically, it swooped down over her shoulders in exact time with her plunging feet, whirling over, forward and downward, as it came; the uplifted hand drew the noose tight, the pony swerved; "forefooted," the luckless avenger turned in air and lit on her side with a resounding thump. Stargazer, swinging awkwardly, was near to following her example, but managed to keep his feet. The cow rose pluckily, gasping but undaunted. Bellowing defiance, she lowered her head for the onset; but the rope tightened with a cruel jerk, and she went down again. This time she took the count. When she got to her legs Dick allowed the loop to go slack; it dropped from her feet. When Rainboldt and the horse made a pass at her she turned tail and made off, defeated and grumbling.

Dick rode leisurely back to his calf. He gathered brush for a tiny fire. Stargazer, bridle tied to rope-end, watched with excited interest every fresh move of this unaccountable master. He began to think he would like the cow business.

Dick took the little running-iron from his saddle and shoved it in the fire. He sat cross-legged in the sand and permitted himself the luxury of a cigarette. The calf blatted dismally.

"*Please,* Mr. Rainboldt!"

Mr. Rainboldt started as if he had really heard the words.

He blinked, and put up a hand to brush away the illusion. But the illusion persisted faintly.

"*Please,* Mr. Rainboldt—I'm *so* sorry."

"This is getting to be a habit," said Mr. Rainboldt calmly. He held up one hand and checked off the fingers of it with the thumb. "Three—three and a beer—twelve hours ago at that. This is serious."

"Won't you forgive me?"

Dick turned his head; he leaped to his feet, scattering the branding fire. Judith Elliott was close behind him. She sprang down. Nibbles whinnied to Stargazer politely. Dick took one glad step forward and checked, stiffening; the girl came on to meet him.

"Mr. Rainboldt, I'm dreadfully ashamed of myself," said Judith in a small, meek voice, "and I humbly beg your pardon."

The unfortunate calf rolled imploring and hopeful eyes at her as she came. Not Dick; the yearling.

"Here, you mustn't feel that way," said Dick stiffly. "Forget it! No bones are broken, that I know of."

"You must remember that I'm only a very ignorant and silly girl," said Judith feverishly, "and then you'll forgive me—won't you?"

"Great Scott, woman, you mustn't feel like that. I don't bear any grudge."

"That don't sound very cordial, Mr. Rainboldt."

Dick pushed back his tawny mane.

"Cordial?" He waved his hand hospitably. "Sit down—make yourself at home. Is that what you want me to say, Jud—Miss Elliott?"

"No, it isn't. I hurt you shamefully, and I want you to say 'Jud—Miss Elliott, I forgive you'—just like that. Those very words. Mr. Rainboldt, I walked home every step; I wouldn't get in the stage. My heels were blistered and my tongue was, too. Yes, it was. I said 'Jud—Miss Elliott, walk, expression, walk!' Now you'll forgive me, won't you—Dick?"

She held out both her hands and Dick took them with marked unresistance.

"It sounds intolerably silly, but if it will make you feel any better, Miss Elliott——"

"Jud—Miss Elliott," corrected the lady. She swept a swift glance at him from beneath her dark lashes.

"Jud—Miss Elliott, then—if you feel that way about it, you may consider yourself forgiven—but unforgotten."

Then a strange thing took place. Her warm, dusky face was near him, her eyes were shining. Dick tried honorably to free his hands and withdraw; Judith, for her part, did the same, as honorably; and both failed dismally. It happens that way sometimes. Indeed, it is hard to say what might not next have chanced, had it not entered Stargazer's head, quite providentially, to go back to the high hills and liberty. That broke the spell. Dick was standing on the rope; he grabbed it just in time. When he had brought the runaway to his senses the girl had fled to her own horse and was regarding him across the saddle, grave and bright-eyed.

"That was a narrow escape," said she.

"It was," agreed Dick, and looked his gratitude at Stargazer.

"I wish he had gotten clear away from you," mused Judith, her cheek on the saddle.

"Oh, was that what you were talking about?"

"It was. I wish he had. Then you might have ridden my horse, while I walked and—and evened it all up." Her face reddened with shame. "That was such a dreadful thing I did!"

"Young woman," said Dick firmly, "listen to me. Never speak of that fortunate affair again, do you hear? No references to allusions either. Mind, now! And get on your horse, please. I'm going to turn this calf loose."

"Aren't you going to brand him?"

"I am not. Ugly business, branding—not pleasant for you to see, when there's no need of it. I was just teaching my horse about ropin', anyhow. James can get his calf any day. I don't care if he never gets it."

"I know what you are going to say next."

"What is it, then?"

"You're going to say, Jud—Miss Elliott, and may you see me home?"

"I am," said Dick. "Correct! And what am I thinking now?" He swung into the saddle.

"If I tell you," said Judith reflectively, "you won't take advantage?"

"I'd scorn to do so," said Dick virtuously.

"Cross your heart and hope to die?"

Dick performed the required rite.

"You are thinking that I am going to fish for a compliment. You're wrong. I'm going to make a confession—of which you are to take no advantage. I told you a whopping big wrong story just now, Mr. Rainboldt."

Mr. Rainboldt made a swift review of recent events.

"Oh, that!" he said scornfully. "The narrow escape, you mean? You didn't mean the pony; you meant us?"

"Yes. We mustn't let it happen again." She pursed her lips to a prim line; but there were little struggling wiggles and wriggles.

"We will not; let me reassure you. It wouldn't have happened this time, only for this infernal horse."

Judith's eyes brimmed with mirth.

"Silly!" she said.

"Yes, wasn't it?" said Dick cheerfully. "And you call that a wrong story—that feeble attempt? Better let me give you some lessons, if you want to learn to be a liar. Why, you poor, innocent child, that wasn't even a falsehood, much less a good round lie. That was timidity."

"You are quick-witted," acknowledged Judith. "The boys said so. They're waiting for you, you know. I promised to bring you back with me if you'd come."

"The boys?"

"You met them—Billy Armstrong and Company—last night."

"Oh!" said Dick doubtfully.

"They'll want to talk to you. You quite won their hearts, Mr. Rainboldt. So let's gallop up. It's getting late."

"Wait a minute, please. Did you mean for always, or only not now?"

"I don't understand you."

"I wasn't to take advantage of your confession, you said. Does that mean never—or not now?"

Judith looked at Fantasia Mountain; she looked down; she

peeped under her long lashes at Mr. Rainboldt, a swift, side-long glance. Then the lashes drooped upon her flaming cheeks.

"Not now," said Judith faintly.

CHAPTER XXX

FACE UP

"Do you mean to tell me," demanded Dick, "that you're all three of you stockholders?"

"Just Pierre and I," said Billy. "Dowlin has a mine of his own, such as it is."

It was Monday afternoon. Dinner was over. Dinner is the midday meal in San Clemente. This was Dick's second afternoon on the Armstrong porch; the stockholders named and the independent mine-owners kept him company, this time.

Having been specially requested by these three young gentlemen to take an hour's nap, to visit a neighbor—to clear out, at all events—the two young ladies had decided for the nap; and had flounced indoors in no very good humor, leaving the young gentlemen in triumphant and undisputed possession of young Mr. Rainboldt.

"Since my advice is not asked for, I'll give it," said Dick. "You sit here and tell me you're in sympathy with the strikers. Then you spring it on me that you're stockholders. Queer stunt, I call it. Operators and workers—now there are two words which mean exactly the same thing; but do they? Nay, brethering! The whole history of what we have agreed to call civilization is in those two words. A mine worker is one who works mines; a mine operator is one who works men."

"Fascinatin' subject, word-study. But about geology, now?"

"The study of operators has a direct bearing on geology, you'll find, Mr. Armstrong. Here are owners and miners in full sympathy, and a strike comes just the same. What's the answer? As an innocent bystander, I say, look for the operator."

"I don't get you," said Billy.

"You have to play deep for these fast ones," said Pierre.

Dick grinned. "The worst thing about education," he said, "is that it fosters a brutal prejudice against guessing. The right guess is good thinking; I call it thinking across lots."

"I don't know what he means," said Pierre, "but then, neither does he."

"I do, too," said Dick. "There are two ways of thinkin' and shootin' revolvers. Just two. One is hand-to-hip, click-click-bang! You don't aim nor nothin', but your bullet or your thought goes home as easy and certain as a carrier pigeon. And you can't tell anybody how to do it. Either you can or you can't, that's all there is about it.

"The other way is slower and mebbe surer. You look at the thermometer, get the distance by triangulation, allow for windage, altitude and the number of drinks under your belt, hold your breath, take a long sight and let go. That's the army style of shooting—the logical style of thinking. It is mighty good. I've seen some dead center bull's-eyes done that way. Me, I like snap-shootin'."

"Show us. Produce."

"Listen, then. We will assume that you fellows represent the average Torpedo stockholder. You don't want a strike; the miners didn't want a strike; your uncle, one of the largest owners of Torpedo stock, was surprised at the strike. Virtuously indignant, also, I gather. But the point is, for my purpose, that the strike took him by surprise. Also, and vastly pertinent, the strike took the strikers by surprise. It seems to have been wished on them by a thoroughly competent wisher. Who and why is the merry little surpriser who surprises so many different people?"

The stockholders stared at each other.

"Spencer?"

"Mendenhall," said Pierre. "Don't you see, Billy, Spencer wouldn't dare do a thing like that on his own hook."

"But," said Billy, "my uncle assures me that Mendenhall sticks up for the strikers at every turn, and is greatly distressed by the whole affair."

"Was that like Mendenhall?" asked Dick.

Dowlin removed the cigar from his mouth. "It was not.

Mendenhall is a highly adjustable phrase on wheels by birth, inclination and training," he said.

"Such eloquence from Dowlin is worth a volume from any other man, Mr. Rainboldt," said Pierre. "There you have Mr. Mendenhall's biography in full. Dowlin is not usually given to poetic licentiousness."

"And the superintendent?"

"You know where they keep things here, Billy. Get the hammers."

"Exhaustive and painful researches," said Billy, "have incontrovertibly shown that Spencer is more objectionable in more different ways than any other man west of any place east of a given point and hence on a line drawn due south or vice versa, as the case may be. Makes me think of Mr. Carker, all teeth and smile and white hands. The man's a bounder."

" 'Eave 'arf a brick at 'im," said Pierre.

Dick nodded sagely.

"Thought so. The miners have been talkin' to me—telling me things they didn't know themselves. They bear you out in every respect. Old Pat Breen stayed with us last night, too, and I found out a heap from the things he didn't say."

"Well?"

"This strike was forced like a forced card in a conjurer's trick. The miners got treatment no self-respecting man would bear—a reversal of all Torpedo traditions, even of the policy Spencer had followed since he came. The timber supply was cut short suddenly, without reason, and where it was needed most. At exactly the same time the ugly treatment began—dockin' wages, arbitrary discharge of men for no cause given, hard words, unspoken slights."

"But what motive could there be in all this?"

"The love of unearned money is the root of all evil. When did this begin? I asked 'em.—Three weeks ago.—Where were they workin' at the time?—All over; lots of places.—But where was the work bein' pushed?—At such a place. Another man, old Malcolm Jedcoe, remembered that the ore had struck him as unusually promising just before the hazing of the men began. Where was that?—At such a place—the

last gallery on the six-hundred-foot level, if you want to know."

"It occurs to me," said Billy ruefully, "that, as stockholders, it might well have been our place to have made these investigations ourselves, instead of waiting for a man with brains to happen along."

"Correct," said Dick, "except about the brains. You chaps have got the brains. What you need is a little piece of new equipment; a self-starter."

"Right-o!" said Pierre. "I knew Billy had to be cranked up to get him in action. But I hadn't noticed it on myself. Thanks to you. Proceed. Press the button. Turn on the juice. Go easy 'round the corners."

"All right. This A. M., old Pat Breen volunteered some information—volunteers it, remember; a suspicious circumstance in itself. He remarked, quite casually, in reference to nothing at all, that Spencer had made some new borings just before the trouble began. Where? 'Just beyond the end of the six-hundred-foot level, as I figure it,' says Breen. 'Between there and the end of the South Tunnel.'"

The two stockholders brought their chairs to a level and looked at each other with a wild surmise.

"My heart is God's little garden," quoth Pierre, "and this is a plant. Billy; it's a freeze-out. Was any report made of these borings, do you know?"

"I do. There wasn't."

"Has Mendenhall the cash to buy Torpedo stock if it goes down?" asked Dick.

"I think not. Clem Gray has, though—his nephew."

"It's face up, then," said Dick. "They've struck rich ore; they're keeping it mum and playing beggar-my-neighbor with the mine to beat down the price of stock. How about it, Dowlin?"

"Face up," said Ed.

"I wish, Mr. Rainboldt," said Billy, "that you'd come with us and talk with Uncle Jim. Maybe you can make him see it."

"Not to-day. I gather that your uncle is, shall we say, a very firm old gentleman? And we haven't got one iota—whatever that is—of real proof. Not a thing but the right guess. What you want is samples from the six-hundred-foot

galleries or the South Tunnel—samples gathered in the dark of the moon."

"But even after we get the samples—and that won't be easy to do without rousing Mendenhall's suspicions—the assayer is Mendenhall's man," objected Billy. "We'll have to send away for an assay before we can be sure. That will take time, and time is just what we haven't got to spare. If another batch of strike breakers comes we're apt to have a fair imitation of merry hell here. You'd better come along and talk Uncle J. C. over, Rainboldt. You could sell a merry-go-round to an undertaker."

"I'd rather not. Not to-day, anyhow. I'm apt to get out of patience when people are firm, that way. And I always like to keep a little patience on hand for emergencies."

"Besides," hazarded Pierre, "you have problems of your own?"

"Here they come now," said Billy. "They didn't sleep long."

CHAPTER XXXI

SALE OR BARTER

Rainboldt went home early, declining an invitation to supper. Miss Violet had been kind, but Miss Judith had been inexplicably civil. The experienced man was hurt and grieved. His experience had been gained in dealings with other men. It is held by many that certain emotions affect the judgment adversely.

He passed the incoming stage; he climbed the steeps of San Clemente Pass at sundown; he turned at the summit for a red glimpse of the high western plain, a shimmering wedge between the foothills.

A stone rolled clatering; Rainboldt turned his head. A man rode down the high trail from the south. Rainboldt waited for him.

"Mr. Rainboldt, I believe?" said the newcomer, and flashed a double row of gleaming teeth.

"Your belief is well founded," said Dick. He knew the man by description; there could be no brother to that false, toothy smile, not in San Clemente. "And you are Mr. Spencer?" Dick held the other with his eyes; he slipped a silver watch from his pocket to his bootleg. The thing was done ostentatiously, a palpable insult. It brought no abatement of the white and even teeth.

"I wish to speak with you, Mr. Rainboldt, on a matter of some importance. I have been waiting for you."

"I listen."

"I am, as you know, the manager of the Torpedo. Mr. Connor has given me golden opinions of you. He assures me that you are the very man for my purpose."

"Considering your informant," said Dick slowly "consid-

ering yourself, and me—I begin to have opinions about your purpose."

The teeth expressed no resentment.

"Connor tells me that you are brave to a fault; reckless. You are young, high-spirited, foot-loose. You have the world before you to choose from; you can go where you will. You are out of work; it is thought that you are not indifferent to money. May I rely on your discretion?"

"You mean, am I for sale? I am—for cash. Stop beating about the bush. I get the idea, and the words we can save for other things. Let's have it. Never mind the sugar-coating. I'm not squeamish."

This plain speaking was not at all to Spencer's mind. He had thought to gloss his purpose with half-words. He drew back, disconcerted.

"Can I trust you?"

"You can trust me to do exactly what you pay me for—no more, no less," said Rainboldt bluntly.

"But if you do not accept my offer?"

Dick reflected.

"Short of burning an orphan asylum or running a newspaper contest for the most popular young lady, I'm your man. If I don't play I'll keep mum, anyhow. Give it a name. No, stop a little. Maybe you won't need to tell me. Why don't you set Connor at it? If it is too strong for his stomach you'd better keep still."

"No, no; it's not that at all," said Spencer eagerly. "It's this way. Connor and his gang must not have any part in the play. And the chief reason for selecting you is that your row with Connor the other night has identified you with the strikers. No suspicion will fall on you."

"It is to discredit the strikers, then?"

"Exactly. The strike-breakers must be above suspicion. The play must be pulled off when Connor's crowd are in evidence elsewhere, so no blame can possibly attach to them. Do it at night. They'll all be at the saloon."

"Do what at night? What do you want to Fletcherize your talk for? You can't make any deal with me unless you speak out of your mouth. What is it you want me to do?"

Spencer lowered his voice to a whisper. "You know how

to use dynamite, of course? Yes? Well, I want you to blow up a tunnel—an adit."

"In the Torpedo?"

"Yes. I'll show you which one. We're running it in to drain the mine so we can stop the expense of pumping."

"And you don't want that expense stopped?"

"It will give the strikers a black eye," faltered Spencer, disconcerted again.

"And you don't want that expense stopped?" repeated Rainboldt. "I need the information to fix my price by. Come through."

"Well—no," admitted Spencer.

"I'll do it," said Dick. "That will be cheap. I thought, from the way you went on, you had a dirtier job to do. Twenty-five hundred, cash."

"I'll give you two thousand."

"Good night to you," said Dick, and put his horse to the trail.

"Come back! Come back, Rainboldt. I'll give you your price."

"You sure will, if you do business with me," said Dick, riding back.

"But I can't pay you in advance. You might keep the money and laugh at me."

"And if I do your dirty work before I'm paid you could keep the money and have a little laugh yourself," rejoined Dick tartly. "I will tell you what I will do with you. I'll draw straws to see which one trusts the other. Or I'll play you the first game of seven-up, and not count any turned-up jacks."

"How would it suit you if I paid you half in advance and half after you do the job."

"Suits me. Fair enough. Get your dynamite and the cash and I'll turn the trick to-morrow night, after the moon goes down."

"I can't have the money to-morrow. I have to wait for—for a certain person to come back and draw the money from the bank. Come Wednesday morning. Wait in the post office casually. It won't do for us to be seen together. I'll drop in to post my letters, and hand you the money when no one is by.

The other half I'll give you the same way—afterward. Don't let anyone suspect that you know me."

"Make yourself easy. I indulge in few social distinctions," said Dick, "but I have a limit. How about the dynamite?"

"Day after to-morrow you get a room at the hotel," said Spencer. "Register, go downtown and leave your door unlocked. The stuff will be in your room when you get back—in a suit case; fuse, caps, candle and all. Keep away from Connor and his bunch. They mustn't be in the question."

"If a breath of suspicion falls on them I'll not ask for any more money," said Dick. "I'll do just as you said—touch her off when your strike-breakers are all accounted for elsewhere. You want me to set the stuff off at the breast at the far end of the adit, of course? All right. Go! *Vamos!* Git! Hope I never see you again after I get my money."

CHAPTER XXXII

LETTER OF THE CONTRACT

Mr. Rainboldt followed his preliminary instructions with painstaking fidelity. Coming back to the Ugly Duckling he found a strange and perfectly good suit case in his room. In a thick letter which the clerk handed him he found some sheets of virgin paper and a key, which key, upon trial, fitted the suit case exactly; a striking coincidence.

"Goods as per invoice," said Dick with a casual look at the contents: Bundled sticks of No. 2 dynamite, yellow and greasy, candle-shaped and candle-sized; a coiled fuse; inch-long fulminuating caps wrapped in wool and packed in a little, square tin box; a candle and a miner's candlestick. Dick locked up the yellow death again and put it aside indifferently. At that same time and motion he put it from his mind. His thoughts went back to the stirring events of the past evening, which, for the better avoidance of the strike breakers, he had spent at the home of Miss Violet Armstrong.

Dick frowned. He was eminently human and had been frankly pleased that those three young men had so unhesitatingly accepted him as comrade and leader. He had liked those young men at first; now he was not so certain. Pierre talked too much; Dowlin was too silent; Billy was too good-looking. Besides, they stuck round so, always underfoot. Violet was charming certainly, and beautiful. But she was wanting in tact. Dick frowned again.

He sat in the moonlight for a long time, propping his face on his hands. It was an unhappy young face. The mouth, softened of late by laughter, took on the old hard lines again. He roused himself with an effort.

"This won't do," he muttered. "I'll see this Torpedo stunt out and then I'll move on. No place for you, Dickie."

He flung himself on the bed to broken slumber; and Judith Elliott's face came softly to his troubled dreams, warm and dim and tinted, smiling and kind.

He rose late and broke his fast leisurely; he sauntered downtown and idled away the morning. As he lounged slowly into the post office, Alfred Spencer bustled through, his brisk diligence a reproach to Dick's loitering. As Spencer brushed by, Dick felt something against his hand. His fingers closed upon it and he passed on to the sloping pine desk built against the wall for the accommodation of the public. Here he looked at what he held in his hand. It was a long and bulky envelope, sealed and unaddressed. Dick thrust it in his pocket, yawning. On later examination, he found within it a sheaf of bills.

Dick strolled to his hotel. He lifted up his eyes to see the workings of the Torpedo-Sundown sprawled along the brown hill: the red engine house, long and squat; the black gallows-frame of the hoist against the skyline; the great gray dump tumbling far and far; the wagon roads, cut deep into the long hillside; between the windings of these roads, the scars of lesser shafts or probing tunnels. Lowest of these, scarcely above the level of Rainboldt's eyes, was the black mouth of the lowest tunnel, the one which was to drain the mine; lower down and somewhat to the right was another long red building, the boarding house of the Torpedo-Sundown, facing San Clemente's outmost street. On the opposite side of the street from the red boarding house stood a weather-beaten twin to it, the boarding house of the Modoc. The Modoc marched with the Torpedo, on the same lode, but the mine had been less fortunate than its big neighbor.

At the tunnel mouth a little car, one man power, shambled in and out, adding its mite to the fan-shaped dump. As Dick watched, the car was shunted on a little side track and left there; the power went whistling down the hill to the boarding house.

"Nearly noon," said Dick. He looked at his watch.

Men came from the tunnel, three, four, six; their faint and breeze-born laughter carried thin to Dick's ear across the deep

arroyo. Another man came from the blackness into the sun, a smaller man, Connor; he cupped his hands and bellowed to the sky the miner's warning of set shots:

"Fire! Fire!"

He ran down the winding trail. Then came the muffled deep report of the blasting, deep in the hill—five shots, six, seven, eight. After a little a thin wisp of smoke drifted from the tunnel. Another bunch of miners came down the hill from the main shaft.

Dick picked up his new suit case and sauntered through the office.

"Hi, you!" said Oleander. "Dinner'll be ready in half a mo'. Ten minutes to twelve. Better wait."

"I'll be back after a bit," said Dick. "I'm just going out to commit an outrage on a friend."

Dick climbed to the hill in the white glare of noon. Smoke and the poisonous fumes of dynamite were still thick in the tunnel. Dick sat on his suit case in the sun and waited for the air to clear. He cut off a generous length of fuse and fixed a cap to it.

"I've got to set it off at the breast, just as I agreed," said Dick aloud. "I'm going to give my respected employer the exact letter of my contract."

After a little he lit his candle; he tied a handkerchief over his nose and trotted along the rails till he came to the broken rock from the noon shots. Beyond this he fixed his bundles of dynamite in the fissures left by the last shots; he split the end of the fuse; he cut open a stick of the powder, and took a bean-sized bit of it on the point of his knife; sticky, oily, granular stuff, about the consistency of mashed bread crumbs. He fixed this dynamite-bean between the jaws of the split fuse; he held the candle to it. The dynamite spluttered, sparkling; the fuse hissed. Dick grabbed up the empty suit case, stumbled over the broken rocks and took to his heels.

"Fire!" he bellowed from the dump. "Fire!"

His cupping hands guided the warning directly at the Torpedo boarding house. No one answered; the men were deep in dinner. Dick walked aside to a safe distance, sat placidly on his suit case, rolled a smoke, lit it, and turned admiring eyes to the sunlit peaks across the sky.

A miner came from the boarding house, whistling; he walked leisurely up the winding trail, picking his teeth. Dick called to him.

"Don't go up there, brother. I'm blowing the tunnel up."

"What's that?"

"I'm blowing up the tunnel," repeated Dick patiently. "It ought to go off any minute now. Bring your toothpick over here and sit down."

The miner stared, laughed and went on. Dick's gun flashed out.

"You long, tall son of Satan, make tracks over here and make 'em quick! I don't want your blood on my head. You'll be blown to bits, you fool! Come over here or I'll shoot you in a holy second!"

The man came, muttering. His face expressed incredulity.

"I cut about a five-minute fuse," said Dick sociably, "but it's been most a week already. Sit down; it won't be long now. Hi! There comes a team!"

A wagon crawled up the nearest road. Dick stood up and shouted.

"Fire! Go back, you fool, I'm blowing up the mine! Beat it, or your horses will run away when the dynamite goes off."

The wagon whirled and went off at a gallop.

"There, he's all right now," said Dick with a sigh of relief, when the wagon reached the bottom. "His team can't run away much in that deep sand. Have a smoke?"

With roar and crash the hill shuddered under their feet; smoke and dust billowed from the tunnel-mouth. Far above them a section of the hillside upheaved with a great shock and settled again with a puff of dust; dislodged boulders rolled crashing into the *arroyo*; the echoes crowded and thundered.

"Some ear-splittin', what?" observed Dick complacently. "You'd better run along now, son, and roll your hoop. You don't want to be mixed up in this—the witty idea is to have the strikers take the blame for it."

The strike-breaker waited for no further permission. He looked back once with a white, scared face. Then he made off at a canter.

Below, San Clemente swarmed from all its doors. Men

ran shouting from along the trail to the mine; men on horseback poured from every street. The wagoner shouted to them; he stood up and lashed his horses.

Dick sat on his suit case and smoked.

The strike-breakers broke from the boarding house on a run. They carried rifles and six-shooters. They had not time to guess what they might expect, from this unexpected development; Dick's captive had been incoherent. But Connor was taking no chances; he shepherded his flock across the hill on a quartering course to a clump of bowlders. They took cover like wounded partridges.

The men from the Modoc house and the neighbor shacks were first to arrive. They halted at a little distance from Dick and stared, incredulous; they huddled together, waiting for reënforcements. The first horsemen crowded by them, Dowlin, Doc Hughes, Billy and J. C.; old Wigfall, afoot, pushed to join them; others dribbled forward.

Dick threw his cigarette away.

"Good evenin'," he said pleasantly, nodding to J. C.

J. C.'s face was a fine plum color.

"You, Rainboldt!" he thundered. "What in——"

"Don't yell at me,' said Dick resentfully. "I don't like it. Take it easy. No hurry. What is it you wished to know?"

"I can't believe you had any hand in it," said the plum-colored one, calming himself with an effort. "But that fellow on the wagon says you told him you were going to blow up the adit. What did you mean by that?"

"I was afraid he would get hurt," said Dick truthfully.

"Afraid he'd be hurt! Afraid——" J. C. choked on his emotions. "And you a guest at my house!" he gurgled.

"I don't see what me visitin' at your house has to do with it," said Dick respectfully but firmly. "I wasn't your guest anyway. You didn't invite me."

"Did you blow up this mine?"

"Sure I did. Why not? I was hired to do it by——"

"Arrest that man! Where's that fool deputy? Gone, of course. Arrest him somebody—throw a gun down on him."

"Why, I wouldn't do that," said Dick mildly. "I haven't done anything wrong. I was employed——"

"Damn your heart!"

"You'd better hear to what he's got to say, Armstrong," urged Dowlin. "He's got something up his sleeve besides his arm. I know what I'm talking about. Give him a chance."

"Give him a noose about his neck!" bawled J. C.

"Now, that'll be about all from you," said Dick. "If you had a lick of sense you'd know that no man would be doing this for fun. Keep still! As I was about to say when you so rudely interrupted me, I was hired to blow up this mine by the properly constituted authorities. Where did I get my dynamite? I didn't buy it at the stores. Ask 'em. I didn't bring it when I came. It was furnished to me by my employer."

"Who? Who?" gasped J. C. But his face showed that he already sensed some part of the situation.

"I couldn't tell you that," said Dick firmly. "You wouldn't believe me if I did. It would just be my word against his. And I promised—it was implied, anyhow—that I wouldn't mention his name. So I won't. But I'll tell you what I will do. You send some of these riders around town, telling them to scatter, as if they were trying to prevent anyone from leaving town, but to be sure to let anybody go that tries to, unless you want a lynching-bee. If you do, catch him. Then start a solid body of your infantry straight to town, letting one man go in front with a highly visible rope. Just one man in San Clemente will make a get-away; he'll hit the short trail for the railroad; and I'll bet you any money you like that you'll find that man's name written on this paper." He took an envelope from his pocket, wrote a name on it, folded it, and handed it to Pierre Hines, who had just pushed his way through.

"We'll do it," said Dowlin. "I'll go with the horsemen. Wigfall, you manage the other crowd. They're mostly your men. Here's a rope."

"Wait a minute, Wigfall. I got good pay for this job—half down. And I want to donate it to your strikers' fund." Dick tossed over the package of bills. "That's only fair. The idea was that the strikers were to get credit for the job, so they ought to have the cash."

Some one cursed with a great voice. The crowd trampled

and swayed; the mutter of many voices swelled to an ominous growl. Dick held up his hand.

"Wait! It was planned that I should dynamite the tunnel when none of the strike-breakers would be accused of having a hand in it. I did just that. They were all down at dinner, as the Modoc men can testify. But my employer forgot to stipulate that I was to make a get-away myself. So I didn't. I gave him his money's worth, to a cent—exactly what he bargained for. He is a frightened man, this minute. Now go, you fellows. Not you Wigfall; you stay here. I want to settle this strike."

Twenty horsemen set out at a gallop to circle the town. The Torpedoes detached themselves from the crowd and plunged down the hill, led by Pendravis.

"By George, they mean business! That's no play," said Pierre. "There he goes!"

A horseman flashed from the corrals behind the Torpedo offices; he raced down the long street and turned at top speed into the river trail, the short cut to the outer world.

"Spencer!" said J. C.

The Torpedoes hung along the hill and howled their hate. Pierre opened his folded paper.

"I find written here'" he said with great tranquility, "the name of A. Spencer. So that incident is closed. Sorry not to be able to say 'I told you so,' Mr. Armstrong; but you wouldn't let us tell you anything."

CHAPTER XXXIII

YOU NEVER CAN TELL

J. C. spoke to Rainboldt in a chastened voice.

"Young man, it is evident that you mean well by us. But why not have told me? Why blow up a perfectly good tunnel? It will cost money to make that good."

"You wouldn't have believed me for any amount of telling," said Dick, bluntly. "Besides, I promised not to mention the name of the man who is now running away on that horse. Had to jar you enough to get your attention. Wigfall tried to talk sense to you, and you bawled him down; your nephew tried to tell you that you were being used to your own hurt, and you wouldn't listen to a word. You roared him down. But you can't roar down fifty sticks of dynamite. I've got your attention; Mr. Spencer has obliged by pleading guilty; now perhaps you will listen while I tell you a few things which will save you the cost of several or more tunnels. You can verify my statements later, but they're true now." Dick took off his hat and fanned himself languidly.

"Go on," said J. C. meekly.

"There's been a big body of rich ore found in your mine, and it's been kept quiet. Spencer forced a strike. The play was to buy up the stock at starvation prices. The mine was to be tied up—What's that?"

It was a rifle shot from a deserted house beyond the valley; it was followed by a dozen more, the steady pumping of a repeater. The bullets whined above them and splattered on the rocks where Connor's crew had taken refuge. A single shot made answer; then silence fell on Fort Connor.

"Hell's bells! We'll have a regular war. Duck! No, stand still, everybody. Don't shoot. Give me that white handkerchief, Pierre."

Dick snatched the scrap of linen; waving it, both hands held high above his head, he marched straight up the hill to Connor's fortress, the sunlight in his sunny hair.

Bullets plumped into the dust close beside him; the unseen gunman seemed to have changed his mark. "Don't shoot, Connor," cried Dick. His voice was clear, cheerful and unhurried. "This is another put-up job. Don't bite. It is none of our doing. But if your men fire back, these fool Welshmen will be neither to hold nor to bind. They're worked up to mischief. Keep out of sight and you can't be hurt. We'll come up as hostages, if you say so—anyone you want."

"I'll do the best I can for you" replied Connor's voice. "You go back and hold down your wolves if you can; you can do us more good there than here. You'd better hurry. That gunman is reloading, I judge, and he seems to have it in for you."

"Lucky you fellows didn't give him a volley," said Dick. "Good judgment. If you had there'd have been a battle."

"Ain't it the truth?" said Connor. "Go back, you fool, before that fellow shoots you. Take your men away. Don't let any of them try to slip round behind us, or I can't answer for mine. Say, we seem to have lost our job, don't we?"

"I reckon," said Dick. He turned to go. "Hello! They've got our friend with the gun."

A little man with a six-shooter came from behind the old house, driving a taller man before him. The prisoner held back, imploring; his captor fell upon him with kicks and cuffs and forced him down toward the valley. Dick began to run.

The Torpedoes, the horsemen, the crowd by the tunnel, were all in motion, converging toward the valley; most of the hitherto prudent citizens were running now from the town to the valley. The little man paused on a shoulder and called to the oncoming mob.

"Here's your gunman! It's Clem Gray! Do you want him?"

A rope was over a limb when Dick reached the valley, breathless. The mob crowded upon Gray with howls and curses. Dick shouldered his way roughly.

"Hearrken to Breen," cried the bull voice of Caradoc Hughes. "Let him bear witness."

"Breen! Breen!"

"There's not much to tell," said the little man. "'Twas Gray that did the shootin'. I was close behind, making for my old mare, having a mind bent to keep out of trouble. But I saw that this devil of a Gray was goin' to start something. Then says I to myself: 'Breen, you've been minding your own business these forty year. 'Tis a pernicious habit.' So when he was loading up his gun again, I took him. That's all. 'Tis up to you."

"Hang him! Oop wi' him!"

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," said Dick mildly.

"And whoi not?"

"He might not come to again," said Dick sensibly enough.

The other glared. He was a burly miner of the Torpedoes and one that had not seen Dick before.

"Close thy mouth, young hop-o'-my-thumb, or happen we'll swing 'ee besoide him!"

"Shame, Daave! 'Tis young Rainboldt. Has been good friend to thee and thoine this daay. But t'other—oot upon him! Would have sold us to blood and shame!"

Dick was hustled aside; snarling horribly, the mob closed in upon Gray. The loop dropped on his neck.

"Hang him! Hang him!"

A counter shout went up at the crowd's edge; a louder cry, in which horror and desperate fear were blended.

Drawn by a galloping horse, a buggy thundered across the *arroyo,* leaping, rocking, swinging. It drove a path through the crowd; men made way for it, fell back from it, white-faced, and ran for life. Old Mendenhall stood up in the buggy, a terrible figure, his eyes aflame, his white hair flying in the wind. One hand lashed the horse, the other held the loose reins and also a cocked six-shooter; and the six-shooter was pointed accurately at an open box on the seat beside him, a fifty-pound box of dynamite. The horse plowed to a stop.

The crowd grew very still. Then said Mendenhall:

"Let that boy go or I'll blow you all to hell in a hand-basket!" His eyebrows bristled. "Move! Take off that rope. Get a rifle, Clemmy boy. Get you a horse, and go. Don't

anybody move a step. The first man that puts hand to gun I pull the trigger. I'll hold 'em, Clem. You drag it."

"Take my horse," said Dowlin gently. "You want to watch him. He stumbles a little, going downhill. You do what your uncle says, Gray. He is a fine old man."

But Gray caught a rifle from an unresisting hand, he cocked it, he ran to the buggy and pressed the muzzle against the dynamite.

"You go, Uncle Hermie, I'll hold 'em! I got you into this mess."

"The Lord be praised—this is old Pete's boy!" cried Mendenhall. "That I have lived to see this day! Thank'ee kindly, Clem, but I couldn't do that. I'm full of years; I'll be noways sorry to slip away from the hubbub."

"Can't we both of us get away, Uncle Hermie?"

"It couldn't be done, boy. I can't ride fast, with this bad leg of mine. They wouldn't have any trouble to overtake us even if we could make a start. They would just ride round and get us from ambush. No good. But I'm glad you made the offer. Good-by, Clemmy."

"Coom on, lads. Let's go whoam!" It was old Wigfall, and his rough voice thrilled. "Happen there's worse men than these. To whoam wi' you!"

"Taake my horse, Mr. Mendenhall," said Doc Hughes gruffly. "And here's my gun. We wouldna give ye rifles if we meant'ee ony harm. I'll mind the beastie that the pooder does not go off by accident. 'Twould be a great pity. Be off wi' you, now. San Clemente is no place at all for you."

"You have given me back my boy." Mendenhall's voice shook a little; only a little. "Gentlemen, I thank you kindly. He has the makin's—old Pete's boy. We're going—and we're going to work with our hands till I make a man of him. If I have to reform myself to do it, I'm going to make a man of him. And when that day comes we're coming back to live at San Clemente."

CHAPTER XXXIV

MEDDLING OF MR. BREEN

THAT night Emil James and Pat Breen sat in the cool and freshness before the Square-and-Compass house, and watched the trembling moon rise over the desert. As they smoked in silence, a ghostly rider drove a phantom band of horses across the wavering lines of moonlight, doubled and turned and headed them back, and pushed them into the corral at last.

"That's Dick, confound him!" said Emil.

"Ay." Breen tapped out his pipe. "Emil," he said after a little, "I mistrust all is not well with the lad."

"And in a case like that?"

"Nothing, of course. What could we do? But," added Breen, with some irritation, "were the cases changed now—if I who am old were five-and-twenty and it was Dick Rainboldt was five-and-sixty, Dick would find a way. I'll be bound for that."

"He's catching a horse," said Emil. "Now, what's that for? I thought he was just driving in a bunch to turn his bronc' loose with."

They heard Dick's saddle come off with a thump; the big gate was opened and a band of horses trotted out. Then the little yard gate clicked and Dick came up the path, leading Wiseman.

"And now where have you been, you jungle cat?" demanded Emil. "Since the fireworks, I mean? Oh, Breen told me all about it. They're makin' a big to-do about you in San Clemente. Goin' to run you for town pump."

"Hello, that you, Mr. Breen? Then that was your horse back in the branding corral. Goin' to stay all night with us?" said Dick.

"No, I just stopped in for supper and a little chat with my old friend here. Where did you go, boy? There's nothing too good for you in San Clemente now, let me tell you that. They sent a bunch over here hot-foot to find you, but they didn't even find Emil. He was down to Willow. Where was you, Rainboldt?"

"Oh, I went nosin' round the hills, huntin' old Wiseman. Missed him the first time; didn't find him till near dark. He was hidin' out on me, the old rascal. Then the bunch didn't want to come, and my bronco misbehaved on me when I wasn't watching—nearly piled me, too."

"Why, what do you want of Wiseman," said Emil. "Where are you going?"

" 'Way, 'way off," said Dick. "I'm going to oil the hinges of the Golden Gate. Can you let me have some corn and a block of hay for the horse, Emil?"

"Dick," said Emil, "don't you go away now; don't you! You've got things coming your way. Stay with it, boy. We'd hate to lose you."

"Every chick and child in San Clemente is your friend," urged the old miner. "Even Connor. 'That's a fine lad,' he said to me, just before he left. 'Why, Breen, that man's got sense! Tell him for me,' he says, 'any time he goes broke to drop me a card—Clay Connor, Australia N. W.: Please forward to Alaska,' he says."

"Connor has gone, then?"

"Every hair of him. Chartered a Mexican freight wagon and they pulled out for a night ride to the river."

"Had any supper, Dick? There's plenty cooked. I'll light up. Feed your horse."

"I'll be with you in three-eighths of a jiffy," said Dick in a wretched attempt at light-heartedness. He clanked on to the little stable. Emil lit the lamp. Breen put the coffee pot on the coals.

"He's going," said Emil.

"He is that. Blow high, blow low, he must be forth from this place."

At the bench outside Dick washed his face and hands with a great spluttering, and came in groping for the towel.

"You're not going to leave us, Dick?" said Breen. In the lamplight his little old face was puckered with distress. "There are some who will miss you."

"Nine days, perhaps," said Dick bitterly. "No, I didn't mean that. Some of you are good friends. But I must go."

"Well, then; I'll be jogging home myself. I'm sorry it's that way with you, boy. Good-by, then—and good luck to you!"

"The same to you," said Dick. "So long!"

Where the trail forked the old Irishman paused, irresolute. He mumbled to himself.

"Gray they were—Katy's eyes. A good lass, a merry lass. Dust she is, these two and twenty years, and her young babe in her arms. How would you have me do, little wife? . . . Have your own way of it, then. It has been many a year since I have cared to make or to mar; but I've meddled already once to-day; please God, I'll meddle once more this night—for Katy's sake."

He turned up the San Clemente trail.

CHAPTER XXXV

ROBIN'S NOT HERE

"Is it not brave to be a King, Techelles,
Usumcusane, and Theridames,
Is it not passing brave to be a King,
And ride in triumph through Persepolis?"

It was brave ranting; she mouthed the sonorous, many-syllabled names; proud step and princely hand were purposely mock heroic. But the high-poised head, the kindling eye, the proud thrill in her gay young voice—these were unconscious and above all assuming.

"Judith! How you do go on!"

"But your king didn't ride in triumph through San Clemente, Judith," teased Billy. "He slipped away like—like——"

"Mist. The Arab. A snake, 'a long, slickery snake.' Morning dew. An eye-opener. A stack of whites. Your summer's wages. Billy, you're failing," said Pierre. "I noticed it on you this afternoon. Even our Abysmal Ed unlimbered himself for a few well-chosen remarks; but you didn't have a word to throw at a dog."

"Right you are. I would have given most anything for a soapstone," laughed Billy. "It wasn't so much that I was scared, either; I was only reasonably scared. But my poor wits couldn't quite keep up with the procession. It was just one simple little thing after another. Happenin' in the simplest way, too. No preliminaries; no introductions; no explanations; no flourishes. Just happened. Then some more happened."

"To my mind, if I may be permitted to use such a term," said Dowlin, "the best little thing that Judith's young man

did was stickin' up his hands and the white flag—makin' terms with Connor. It may have been crowded from notice by more spectacular happenings, but that was really the big stunt of this eventful day. Anybody's got nerve. But it took brains to do that."

"Hear, hear!"

"Now you stop pickin' on Ed," snapped Violet.

"Then my young man, as you call him, prevented a general fight, you think?" said Judith.

"General fight is right. Relations were distinctly strained. A massacre, as far as our own little bunch was concerned. Ask Billy. Ask Pierre—that will be better."

"Far better," agreed Billy. "I haven't caught up yet. I've got as far as where old man Mendenhall started to do a Paul Revere. But I'm still speculatin' on why he didn't jar the giant powder off, and if so, why not and what next? That old chaise of his was proceedin' from thither to whence by great leaps and bounds when I caught a glimpse of it, dynamite gayly bobbin' up and down and the old gentleman steadyin' it with his knee. Fine!"

"But we wander from Judith's young man," said Pierre. "My opinion was asked, I believe. I string along with Ed. In my judgment we missed war by one clipped second; and Rainboldt used that second. Connor's men had the bulge on our crowd; we were in the open. 'Twould have been the survival of the fleetest for us. It would have marred a pleasant afternoon. Then Connor's men would have been picked off, one at a time, from up the hill."

"I don't think you're fair to Mr. Connor," said Violet. "He wouldn't let his men shoot back at Clem Gray, you said. Don't you give him any credit for that?"

"Hello, young people! Holding a post mortem?" It was J. C., benevolent in the doorway.

"We were just commenting on young Rainboldt's management of you, Uncle Jim," said Billy. "The way he told you where you might get off was worth coming miles to see."

"Wish I might have been there," sighed Violet. "It isn't fair. When there's any fun I have to stay at home because I'm a girl. It's a shame. At any other time everybody treats me as if I were a boy. Judith never says: 'Bring the boys

and Violet.' She just says: 'Bring the boys.' Dad, I'm going to ask Mr. Rainboldt to bully you again, just for me—a private rehearsal."

"That young man will go far. He can have the keys of San Clemente any time he wants them." J. C. paused for a twinkly smile. "But, even when he was twisting me up into hard knots, he restrained himself: I noticed that. He made reservations. He showed a consideration for me, a respectfulness, quite uncalled for by the circumstances—or so it seems to me. Confidentially, I think he had something on his mind; some private designs—what? Oh, Dowlin; Breen wants to see you at the gate. I nearly forgot to tell you."

"But what private designs could Dickie have?" inquired Billy, as Dowlin went out. "What could he want?" His speculative eye, in its wanderings, carefully avoided Miss Elliott.

"Don't know. But if he wants it, he'll get it," said J. C. genially. "No use talking, some of these cowboys are grown men. They have to think for themselves, and think quick, in that business. No time to send for experts. The bulk of the cowmen, like the bulk of any class of men, are only so-so, aside from their work; but when you get a really good cowman, you've got something!"

Judith rose and made a deep curtsy.

"Thank you, uncle. You are all witnesses to that," she said, impervious to banter and gibe. She had never been more radiant; she danced across the room now, light-spinning, gossamer; she turned at the window and sang, gay, defiant, wistful, laughing:

"What's this dull town to me?
Robin's not here:
He whom I wished to see,
Wished for to hear.
What, when the ball was o'er,
What made my heart so sore?
Oh, it was parting with
Robin Adair!"

Violet made no remonstrance, but she favored Judith with

a prim and decorous glance, to which Miss Elliott responded with a rebellious little *moue.*

"What was that splendid quotation you gave us the other day, Pierre? The one you said applied so well to the cowmen who kept right on with their cowman-ing while civilization closed in on 'em?"

"Oh, that! Let's see, how'd it go?' Oh, yes:

"Sowed in a dream amid the harvesting."

"By George, it's true. Civilization *is* their harvesting, poor old chaps! Some one has said that the history of Europe is written in one line: 'England is an island.' And the history of America is the story of the pioneer. . . . We forget that, sometimes."

"What's keeping Ed?" said Violet rising. "Let's go out on the porch. I like that Mr. Breen. And the moonlight is glorious."

"Where's Breen, Dowlin?" said J. C., on the porch.

"Gone."

"Anything wrong, old man?" asked Pierre, quick to notice Dowlin's troubled face.

"Ed's grievin' over the opportunity he missed when he made his little presentation speech to Clem Gray," mocked Billy. "It goes like this, Dowlin: 'Pray accept this humble offering as a slight token of our esteem and respect'—something like that."

The air was velvet. A cool, fresh, faint breeze rustled by and whispered secrets.

"Bully moon!" grunted J. C. "Wonderful night!"

"Wonderful!" echoed Judith.

"Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold!"

She stretched out her hands to the night; her young voice rang out, glad and high, clear, strong and jubilant:

"In such a night as this,
When the soft wind did gently kiss the trees

'And they did make no noise; on such a night,
Troilus, methinks, mounted the Trojan wall
And sigh'd his soul toward the Grecian tents,
Where Cressid lay that night."

"Judith, you madcap!" said Violet.

"Clean bewitched, poor child," groaned Billy.

Judith's eyes sparkled joyous mischief and defiance; she dropped one hand and waved the other slowly, beckoning, above her uplifted face:

"On such a night
Stood Dido with a willow in her hand
Upon the wild sea banks, and waft her love
To come again to Carthage."

"I can't stand this. The girl is fey!" whispered Dowlin to himself. Then he raised his voice. "Judith! Here a minute, won't you?"

He stepped into the hallway; Judith joined him.

"Well?" she said cheerfully.

Dowlin paused, uncertain. Then he blurted out his word. "He's going away—Rainboldt. For keeps."

"Oh!" said Judith.

"In the morning. Breen came to tell me."

"I'm sorry," said Judith, bracing her small mouth to piteous bravery. "Come to the piano, Ed. I'll play and you sing. I—I don't want to go back on the porch."

"You want us to go home, Judith? I'll herd 'em away for you, after a bit. I'll do a bluff at a song or two first. Then I'll hustle 'em out."

"You're a good friend, Ed."

CHAPTER XXXVI

MONEY TALKS

Dick tossed restlessly upon his narrow bunk. To-morrow he would pass from Judith Elliott's life forever. He recounted the excellent and unanswerable reasons why it must be so. It was preposterous that he had dared to raise his eyes to her—serene, high, unattainable. What had he to offer her? Nothing. A cowboy, uncouth, unlettered, unmannered! Folly and madness!

Having thus firmly established that she was above and apart from him, he began again. Over and over he toiled at his endless, hopeless task. Never to see her again, never to hear her voice! That she should forget him, that he should be to her, at best, a misty detail in a half-forgotten springtime, he could bear that. But—never to see her again!

He rose at last, dressed, and went out into the night. A few clouds were in the sky, and a chill, keening wind wailed sadly through the trees. The high cold stars, unchanged, unchanging, looked calmly down upon him from immeasurable heights; the moon's pitiless light fell on the drear and lonely hills, showing their barrenness and savage desolation with cruel distinctness.

He turned up the trail to the San Clemente Gap.

There was no slightest glance or tone of hers that he did not remember now. The warm mystery of her wistful face rose before him, thrilled him, lured him on. How fair she was, how sweet and good and true. She must not know, she must never dream. It would only grieve her.

He paused at the last little hill below San Clemente Pass. There, in the crest above him, she had given him the dollar. Was that a lifetime ago? And he had thrown it away—fool

that he was—instead of explaining and making it easier for her. He would find that coin now and keep it—always. That was the tree, that bush-topped cedar, beyond the second little gully——

What was that—white—moving?

The neighbor stars bent low to kiss the hills; the dear old hills, never again to be remembered apart from youth and hope and love. For it was Judith, weeping, sobbing, searching——

The kindly, wise old moon hid then behind a cloud. So they did not find the dollar.

OVER ON THE MALIBU

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE ENCHANTED VALLEY

REELING, the white wrack of stars fled down the west, save where a grim rear-guard, rock-stubborn in the rout, still held the dawn at bay.

In the Hueco stage, L. Orrin Sewall, cramped and stiffened from the long night ride, glanced enviously at his one fellow passenger, now sleeping peacefully on the impromptu berth—happily combined of seat, baggage, lap-robe, and mail sack—which Sewall had found impossible. Thereon, as to the manner born, Emil James curled luxuriously, oblivious of whip-crack, lurch and jolting wheel.

Weird, ghostly, the giant candelabra of the saguarro shaped forth from the shadows ahead, bore down upon them, slipped by and faded back to dimness in the rear.

As it grew lighter, Sewall saw that they were plunging against an enormous mass of mountain, blue-black, huge, forbidding. The black became gray—brown—pink—but Sewall looked vainly for gap or gateway in the frowning wall. He was about to question the silent driver, when Emil rolled over and sat up.

"Ugh-h! I dreamed I was asleep!" he said blinking and stretching. "Hello! here we are! Say, you'd hate to make that drive by daylight."

Sewall turned. The grouped windmills of La Mancha, the last stage-station, were already far below them, so clearly outlined as to seem almost at hand, yet shrunken to toy dimensions. Tiny but distinct, a meager feather of smoke curled lazily above the cook-house.

The stage-road, white and straight, dimmed to a line a

speck—nothing. Beyond the overwhelming desert, Pinetop and La Fantasia loomed monstrous and unbelievable. The early camp-fire of San Clemente shone redly, palpitant, firefly sparks through the faint thin mists of dawn.

"There's where we started from—those fires yonder," said Emil, pointing. "Eighty consecutive miles from here, those fires are. Don't look it, do they?"

They wheeled swiftly up the steady slope of foot-hill, over a road of decomposed granite, yellow and red and golden warm, picked with white gleam of crystal and quartz, so beaten and packed that it was resonant under the scampering, rhythmical feet. Scurry of rabbit, whir of startled quail, perfume of blossomed mesquite; the ranked saguarro, fluted and gray-green now to the clearer light. To right, to left, down the spinning brown isles of pungent tar brush, there was flaunting of riotous scarlet, flash of crimson flame—the flower of the cactus.

Snuffing cheerfully in the cool freshness, the four ponies swung gaily around the long sinuous curves, eluding ridge or *arroyo,* ever sacrificing distance to grade.

And now they were at the very base of the Hueco's mighty, prodigious, buttressed bulk. The hazy crest formed a battlement frowning and sheer, with upshoot of granite needle and spur, already flushing to a delicate pink in the upper sunrise.

"So that's the Hoo-ee-co mountain, is it?" asked Sewall.

Emil sat up, a malicious light in his eye. All the long road from San Clemente to sleepy-time his companion had enlightened the aboriginal mind with precisely worded, cocksure information—more especially crushing current political heresies under the weight of expert authority. In labeled pigeon-holes of Sewall's neat and orderly mind were filled phonographically accurate records of the wisdoms promulgated by Prof. J. Langdon Leighton, of Pharos University; endorsed by men whose names were synonyms of success, and full of sonorous words as blessed as Mesopotamia. Emil had been so entranced with some of the more poetical terms that he had privately added them to his own vocabulary; rolling them in silent anticipation as sweet morsels under his tongue. "Empiric," "demagogue," and "charlatan"—always delivered

by Sewall in accents of virulent and scornful superiority—especially appealed to Emil as words useful to him in his vocation.

"Hoo-ee-co?" he echoed, "No siree! H-u-e-c-o. You pronounce it 'whaco,' and it means 'hollow,' like a tree."

"Why do you call it that?" continued Sewall. "And where's the town?"

Emil looked puzzled. "Why—why, we call it that—well, partly because that's its name, partly because the mountain is a hollow mountain. And the town's in the hollow basin inside, like a saucer."

"Someway," said Sewall, disappointed, "I'd got the impression that the town—what's its name—Son Todos?—that Son Todos was quite a place."

"Oh, well—like a butter-bowl, then," said Emil, generously. "Saucer-shaped, I meant, not saucer-sized. Strictly speaking, there ain't no town. Just a four-story settlement, like. Farms in the valley, cows and horses on the hillsides, mines underground, and goats in the upper air. Son Todos, where we stop—stage-station, post-office, store, everything else—was the first ranch, and the valley took the name."

"But why San Todos?"

"What d'ye want us to call it?" said Emil, petulantly. "'South West New J. Q. "Adamsburg?' 'New Canterbury?' 'Versailles Center?' 'Tyre and Sidon?' 'Son Todos' means 'That's All.' Because—well, just because that's all. You can't go no further."

"What queer names you have in this country," meditated Sewall.

"You from Schenectady, too?" queried Emil, tartly.

"Schenectady? Oh, no; I'm from Poughkeepsie," said Sewall in all simplicity.

The driver choked. "This here dust all the time is mighty bad for my throat," he explained his first and last contribution to the council.

A pipe-line, straddling on crazy stilts, rambled drunkenly down the tangled hillside to a string of watering troughs, where a few cattle were straggling in. In the overhanging, broken precipice ahead, Sewall now became aware of a shallow fissure set obliquely to the mountain's trend. Suddenly

it became an appalling chasm, deep hewn by the stupendous chisels of fire and frost and flood. Into this they plunged blindly though it apparently ended in a hopeless "box" a little higher up.

"Surely there is some mistake!" ejaculated the Easterner. "We can never get up there!"

"Yes we can. There's an escalator. You'll see!" said Emil reassuringly.

At the last moment, rounding a turmoil of broken and splintered rock, they came to an angled cleft, narrow, portentous, dark; widening to a wild cañon, scarred and gashed and torn, its cliffs carven grotesquely to dragon and gnome and leering face, spiteful, haggard, importunate, sinister. Turning, twisting, by boulder and gully and scar and cairn, flood-torn wash, abrupt steeps, hog-back, with downward plunge and squeal of protesting brakes, they held their doubtful way. The solid rock opened magically before them; closed irrevocably behind.

"We call this Zig-Zag," volunteered Emil. "A—eh—a whim of ours," he added, diffidently.

Sewall actually smiled. "It *is* crooked," he admitted.

"Yes. Good thing, too. No snakes in the valley. Break their backs trying to get through."

Another turn, followed by a long steep pitch up a buttressed shoulder: a black lettered boulder flashed them ironical warning:

DANGER!
SLOW DOWN TO EIGHT MILES AN HOUR!

They came to the top in a breathless scramble, bursting through that unquiet gateway, that shuddering confusion of hobgoblin nightmare, into a waiting, waking, sunlit world beyond.

So beautiful it was, so peaceful and sheltered, so sharp the contrast with the savage grandeur of the Pass, that Sewall involuntarily broke into an exclamation of delight. He quoted under his breath:

"The island valley of Avilion;
Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly."

The air was fragrant, balmy, aquiver with bird-song and questing bee. The saucer slopes, though boulder strewn, were smooth and symetrical in contour, thin-parked with cedar and live oak and dotted with strange flowers. Cattle and horses grazed leisurely, raising their heads to regard the intruders with mild contemplation. Bands of snow-white Angora goats, escorted by knowing collies, were on their browsing way to the herbs and shrubs of the higher reaches. Above the winding road they could see the frequent scar of dump or tunnel and rock huts clinging to the hillsides.

The flat floor of the saucer was a sweeping field of shaded emerald, unbroken save for winding irrigating ditches and dividing fences, and twice grateful after the pale desert. There were no buildings on the floor; the level land, which alone could be cultivated to advantage, was too valuable.

On the lower hill, barely above the floor, the road circled around this farm land. Just above it, wherever a tiny rill ran sparkling down the mountain, were nestled homes of flat-roofed adobe or stone, deep set in orchards, vineyards and gardens. For this, the hill was terraced with much toil to a sort of giant stairway, blasted from a rocky slope. The lower side of each step was walled with the boulders, filled in behind with small rocks and debris, laboriously covered with soil and leveled for irrigation; always with a "tank" on the top for the hoarding of water.

"I have never seen a fairer spot," said Sewall, drawing a long breath. "But I suppose, like every other place, it has its drawbacks?"

"It has," assented Emil, decidedly. "Real things—beef, milk, eggs, grain, fruit—they have the best and to spare. The mines are good, too—but low grade ore and the long haul to the smelter—see? Even their beef-herds can't be driven across the desert in first-class shape. Too far between water-holes. They get the highest market-price for what they use, but the surplus—well, freight and shrinkage wipes out the profit. You just merely get day wages for your trip. Then you blow in the day wages seeing El Paso. That's about right.

"So there's no money. They're learning, though. They're raising their own pork now, which isn't considered a proper

thing for a cowman to do. They make ropes out of colts' tails and rawhide, mold their own candles, and let the women wash with *amole* to save buying soap. But there's no ready money. Everything's bought on time. One week after steer-sale the money's all back in Kansas City. Exports: ore, cattle, mohair, and raw material for freshmen. Imports: everything else. But they'd be the happiest *gente* on earth only for one thing."

"What's that?" asked the tourist, much interested.

"Debt."

"Whom do they owe?"

"Each other," said Emil, with an explanatory wiggle of his fingers. "Always buying and trading—no cash. It spoils their peace of mind. And here we are."

Where the largest rivulet tinkled bell-like over mimic cascades to a natural shelf, stood a cottonwood grove. In its dense, impenetrable shade the stage drew up before the low rambling building of Son Todos—post-office, store, hotel, livery stable, blacksmith shop. Freight depot it was, too, judging from the evidence of the huge-wheeled wagons rigged with chains and stretchers for twenty-horse "jerk line" teams; each with another wagon, smaller indeed, but still enormous, trailed behind. A chuck-box, in the trail wagons, replaced the usual end-gate; water barrels were swung on platforms built at either side, just forward of the rear wheels.

"You see," explained Emil, as they sat down to breakfast *al fresco,* with an orchestra of far-off mocking birds and the cheerful undertone of broken waters, "You see, it's no trouble to produce here, but it's a long, long ways to the consumer. If you do your own hauling—well, you likely aint got more than one little muzzle-loading, four-horse rig. You go down full of freight, come back mebbe empty and mebbe full of booze. Got your choice of bad or worse. Whitly now, he's got five or six big freight outfits like them yonder. He does the freighting as cheap as the boys could do it themselves. But still he makes money on it, for he freights, as you may say, by the wholesale, and gets retail rates, d'ye see? And he gets his own stuff brought back for nothing. Keeps the teams on the road all the time. No loss for idle plant."

"He ought to get rich," said Sewall.

"Well, yes. He is doing well—buying some city property in El Paso. But as for actual cash—well, you see, he carries 'em all over and that takes a lot of money."

"Carries them over? I don't understand."

"He sells us everything we need—grub, clothes, barbed-wire, saddles, everything—on a year's time," explained Emil. "Sells them, I mean; I don't live here myself. Just come over once or twice in a while to get rested. So they bring their produce—ore, mohair, grain and baled alfalfa—and turn it in on account. He don't buy it, 'cause naturally, mail only coming in once a week, he can't keep track of prices. He just credits 'em with the quantity, sells it for them the best he can, and charges a fair freight. If there's anything over, he pays their taxes for 'em, or may-be-so sends money for their kids off at school, as the case might be.

"Yes—Whitly is well fixed, all right. They don't grudge it to him. He keeps a look-out for good things. If there's a boy that ought to go to college or a young woman of energy and enterprise wanting to try the city—why, Whitly finds 'em a chance. But as for cash, he spends it fixin' up things; improvements, you know—a little old flour mill here, a sorghum mill there—something to help 'em all. And he coughs up surreptitious for valley-folks out in the said sad world, that's sick or in trouble. There ain't many of 'em."

Sewall nodded. "I can understand that," he said. "Prisoners of content."

"So while the old man handles lots of coin, he don't keep it in stock," continued Emil. "Any margin that might be comin' to the valley he brings back in the shape of canned progress—the latest thing in sewing machines, phonographs, and the like. He's comfortable—same as the rest—and he saves them the trouble of thinking. But about all he gets out of it is the fun of being boss.

"Well, so long, I am going up to see a friend. Folks'll drop in bimeby after their mail. Be good!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

WIZARD OF FINANCE

"No," said Emil, carelessly, an hour later, answering Cal Rucker's question as to the newcomer, "not a bad sort of fellow. He'll maybe want to measure the Huecos with his little foot-rule and reduce 'em to grains Troy—but there's no harm in him."

Here he was interrupted. George, brother to Cal, rode into the yard, coming directly to the "gallery" of Cal's bachelor home, and to the point.

"Hulloo, Cal! Howdy, Mr. James. Say, Cal—you got any money?"

Cal turned his pockets wrong-side out, made hopeful search of his hat, and shook his head with decision.

"Too bad," said George. "I owe Tom Hendricks on them milk-cows, and he needs it. I allowed I could borrow it off Whitly, but he just blew his roll for a threshing-machine. Told me he hadn't cash to give Tom Garrett an advance for boring a well over the Divide. I've got a good lot comin' from Miss Hagan's boardin'-house at the Mormon mine for milk, butter, eggs, and garden truck. But 'course she can't pay till the boarders pay, and they can't pay till Jimmy Dodds gets returns from his last shipment.

"So Hendricks 'll nicely have to wait," interrupted Cal, cheerfully dismissing the subject as trivial. "Come along, you two, and see my pigs."

They stirred up the sleeping beauties—one white and one spotted.

"Now, them's sure nice hawgs," said George admiringly. "Say, Cal, give you that gun you was wantin' for 'em."

I'll give you one of 'em for it," was the counter offer.

"No, you wont. Tell you what I will do, though," George proposed. "You've got to be gone to the roundups. Let me fat 'em on shares. I got plenty of milk and corn and I stay to home steady."

"All right," said Cal, nothing loth. "Keep 'em till December first for half?"

"Help me start 'em!" said George.

After some jockeying, the pigs went merrily frisking on their way. Emil and his host were returning when George came back.

"Hey, buddie! 'Spose one of them hawgs die? How about that? Do we whack on the other one?"

"Nary whack. I was always luckier than you was," returned Cal, confidently. ("George's married!" he added in acommiserating, aside to his guest.) "White one's mine, spotted one's yours, for better or worse."

"That's fair. It's understood then—the white one's yourn, and Spot's mine?"

"Sure thing!" Cal agreed.

George rode a few steps and turned back again, struck with a sudden thought.

"Tell you what, Cal—I'll give you the gun for your white pig."

He held out the gun, tempting in its silver and pearl. Cal's eyes twinkled covetously.

"Belt and all?" he queried, shrewdly.

"Belt and all?"

"I'll go you once."

George promptly unbuckled the belt and handed it over. Then Emil spoke for the first time.

"Run along now, Callie boy, and shoot tin cans. I want to make a little talk with your brother."

When Cal was on his way, Emil twisted his hands in the saddle-strings and said diffidently:

"I didn't want to be too forward, Mr. Rucker—not knowing you very well, but—well, your brother's an old friend of mine, and this is no use to me just now. If it'll help you any, you're welcome. Been there myself." He held out a crumpled and wadded hundred dollar bill.

George spread it out, regarding him gravely.

"Why, this is right clever of you, Mr. James, if you're sure you can spare it?"

Emil waved his hand.

"All right, then, and thank you kindly. We'll go back and have Cal stand good for this, if you'd rather. Good old noodle, Cal," said George, with fraternal indulgence. "Lucky chap!"

Emil looked back.

Lucky Cal stood half-turned toward them, scratching his head, glancing alternately at his brother and at the six-shooter on his open palm, his whole attitude expressive of dawning distrust.

"I guess that wont be necessary," drawled Emil, tone and face of preternatural gravity. "I have a good deal of confidence in your commercial ability, Mr. Rucker."

"Thank you again, then. I'll do as much for some other fellow. See them blame pigs hike, will you? *Adios!*"

"Me for a nap," announced Emil, as he came up the path.

Cal sat on the gallery, a puzzled look on his face, regarding the six-shooter with marked disfavor.

"Good gun, Cal?" asked Emil, with lifted brows.

Cal half raised the gun and gazed solicitously after his departing brother.

"I've a blame good mind to see!" he said earnestly.

When Emil awoke in the late afternoon, his host was not visible. So Emil made his way to San Todos, finding there a lively crowd of old acquaintances. But Sewall adroitly appropriated him and drew him apart. He had changed notably in twenty-four hours, his slightly patronizing attitude was abandoned for one of enthusiasm, informality, and eager inquiry.

"This is the greatest place I ever saw," he said. "I want you to explain a number of things to me. In the first place, how do you reconcile Mr. Whitly's paternal guidance with his saloon-keeping?"

"That's easy," returned Emil. "He does that to hold the boys down. He hates whisky some, but drunkenness a good deal more. So long as he keeps a saloon, d'ye see, no one else is going to—not in this valley. And when a man you

like, a man that's done you favors, advises you to taper off—especially if you owe him a good deal of money and intend to owe him more—why you're apt to heed as well as hear. Besides that, you know he won't let you have another drop anyhow."

"That's clear enough," said Sewall. "But, see here," he added suspiciously, "you mustn't play any more tricks on travelers."

"Tricks?"

"Oh, you're innocent, aren't you? You told me these people have no money. Why, they've got it to burn! Buying, selling, paying debts, trading and giving boot, and always handing over the cash."

Emil recalled the solemn political and financial maxims laid down by his fellow traveler on the previous night, but refrained from comment.

"Oh, well!" he said with lightsome gesture, "I told you they had the real thing—land, stock, produce. If there's more money in circulation than there used to be, they're not really any better off than they were before—they just seem to be."

Sewall chuckled.

"Oh, you don't fool me any more with your whimsicalities. Your pretended opinions are only a part of the characteristic quiet fun that seems to prevail here—like the 'slow down' sign at the pass. Oh, I like it here! The people are the jolliest, friendliest, best-natured set I've ever met! No blues or hard-luck stories here.

"I don't mind telling you, in confidence, that I came here to look into Mr. James Dodd's coppermining proposition. I'll own that you fooled me with your humorous account of financial conditions, and that I had formed an unfavorable opinion of the business ability and energy of these people. But when I see them, everyone with elastic step, sparkling eye, high spirits—everyone, even Mr. Dodd's miners, with the confident assurred air of men on the winning side—it's prepossessing, I tell you. Of course, one cannot allow such things to influence one's business judgment, but I must admit that their jaunty, care-free bearing has impressed me, and that I rather expect to find the mine a good thing."

"Oh, it's a good mine, all right, all right," murmured Emil.

"Be the mine what it may," declared the Easterner, bubbling with enthusiasm, "it's a great country! I intend to secure a holding here—shooting-box, summer-house, that sort of thing—and bring out my nervously prostrated friends to get back into tune with life."

"Let me make you acquainted with some of the boys," said Emil.

So presently they were the center of an animated group under the trees. Cal and George were among the number. When most of the male population were gathered to entertain Sewall, George edged Emil to one side. He was highly elated.

"There's been the blamedest goin's-on you ever heard of," he confided. "You see, that there bill of yours was about the first loose money around here for quite some time. Our credit's good; we all know each other. We'll pay all right, sometime. We'd rather owe a man always than go back on a debt. But somehow a good debt ain't the same thing as good coin. I reckon every fellow around here either owed debts he hated not payin', or else there was something he'd been a-wantin' bad for a long time. Cash made quick tradin'. You never saw such circulatin' since you was rolled down hill in a barrel, never."

"I tried to overtake a lie, once," suggested Emil, thoughtfully. "I think I understand."

"That's the way this was. I paid Hendricks. He handed it over to Nate Smith for four ponies he'd bought. Nate turned it in on his store bill. Whitly advanced it to Tommy Garrett on the well-borin'; and Tom paid it to his fireman. He'd been lettin' Tom hold out his wages, 'count of Mis' Garret bein' sick."

"Well, Tom's man, he's sparkin' Miss Berenice. So he put the greenback up agin Squatty Robinson's new buggy and harness, first throw at dice. Squatty bought a stack of alfalfa from Lon——"

"——That tossed the dog, that worried the cat, that caught the rat, and so forth?" intimated Emil, politely.

"Anyway," George persevered, "along towards supper time the Foy boys that's driftin' on the Mormon paid it to Bill

McCall for last winter's beef. Mac got four broncos from Nate for it—pick 'em anywhere on the range. Nate was now so plumb affluent that he loaned it to Jimmy Dodds There bein' no change, Jimmy just gave it to the four men on the night-shift. They put their heads together and handed it over to Mis' Hagan on their board bill. Mrs. Hagan's that tickled she puts Bobby on burro and surprises me with it—the same old bill with a red ink-blot on it—and I hereby returns the same to you with my compliments. Much obliged for the loan."

"Don't mention it," said Emil, pocketing the bill. "Whitly's lighting up. Guess the boys are going in."

The crowd was slowly sauntering by, deep in conversation.

"Really, I don't know," said Cal to Sewall as they passed. "George, he speaks pretty good Spanish. George, what does *'que tomas ustedes?'* mean?"

"What will you have?" translated the unsuspecting George. The assembly, turning briskly to the saloon, answered in joyful chorus:

"Beer!"

And Cal squealed like a pig.

Alone that night, Emil stirred up the fire, took out the bill that had so prospered Son Todos, looked it over carefully, then sadly held it to the flame.

"Pity it's counterfeit!" he said. "I wonder, now, if all them debts is squared up honest?"

CHAPTER XXXIX

"IF ANTONY BE WELL REMEMBERED YET"

"Hello, you! Long time no see. Have a cigar," said Whitly.

"Same right back at you. Thanks."

Whitly pushed out a chair. "Rest your feet. What can I do for you?"

"Well," said Emil, "one of your freighters had a horse go lame on him awhile back and I let him have one of mine to drive home."

"Yes. A churnhead. Thanks. How much?"

"Could you let me have another one now?" said Emil. "I came over on the stage and brought my saddle in the boot. If you can fit me out, I'll ride on down the range a spell."

"What kind of a horse do you want?"

"Oh, any kind, so long as his name is Pussyfoot; a gentle one and a good saddler."

Whitly put his hands to his chair arms and hoisted himself up, grunting. He was a short, fat man with a circular face—a shrewd and pleasant face for all that. He waddled to the back door, and called into the courtyard.

"Bill, oh Bill! You go and hunt up the orneriest horse you can find and name him Pussyfoot. Bring him here for James, and have the bill sent to me."

He let himself down in his chair by reversing the hoisting process, and leaned forward, hands on knees. "Well? You didn't come over here to get a horse or the price of one. What's on your mind?"

"Railroad coming through," said Emil.

"Wolf! Wolf!"

"But there was a wolf, sure enough—don't you remember? And there's a wolf now."

"Been hearing about that railroad any time these twenty-five years," said Whitly, briskly. "Talk's cheap."

"Well," said Emil, simply. "Dick says he's going to build it. I reckon that settles it."

"Who's Dick?"

"Friend of mine."

"Money?"

"Brains."

"If you're sure of that—well, that makes it different," admitted Whitly. "What's the idea?"

"Same old thing. The love of women is the root of all evil. There's a girl going to marry Dick," explained Emil. "Fine upstanding wench she is, too—snapping black eyes—full of the Old Harry. Old J. C. Armstrong's niece, she is, Judith Elliott—oodles of money. And Dick, he's got a silly idea that he mustn't marry her—just because of that money—till he has made a pile himself. I tried to tell him that was all foolishness, but I couldn't talk him out of it. So he's going to build that railroad.'"

"Take your time, now," said Whitly. "I got nothing in the world to do but squat around and enjoy your conversation. Go it! Say, aint you never going to grow up? Great big overgrown boy—that's what you are! I can relate your final prank right now." Mr. Whitly waved his pudgy fingers with a fine oratorical flourish and his voice took on the stagy tone of one who quotes emotionally. "Mr. James kept his gay spirits to the end. His last remark was characteristic of the man. "Is my tie on straight?" said Mr. James to the hangman, and looked down his nose. We shall miss his childish prattle.'—Say! are you going to loosen up? Maybe you want me to ask questions. Is that it? All right, then; who is this Dick-man going to get to put up the money for the railroad? Nate Logan, maybe?"

"Not such a bad guess. Nate is to be allowed to put on the finishing touches, but he won't get the chance to build the road," said Emil. "Dick got his idea the same place you got that 'Wolf! Wolf!' story—from old John Henry Æsop. Remember the yarn about the quail in the farmer's wheat, and what the farmer said to his boys?"

"Yep. Neighbors was going to come to help reap. 'No

hurry,' says old mother quail. Then his kinnery was comin' to help. 'No hurry,' said mamma quail."

"That's the yarn,'" said Emil. "And the farmer says, 'Boys, we will now cradle this wheat.' 'Let's go!' says the wise old quail. That is Dick's idea. We're going to build this railroad ourselves—let's go! Dick picked my brains of all the information I had and mulled it over in his head a spell. Then he called us all together and broke the news. He has the full confidence of everyone in San Clemente, man, woman, chick and child—on account of a stunt he pulled off about ten days ago. So we was ready to hark and heed——"

"Hold on!" interposed Whitley. "This Dick—is he young Rainboldt, that busted the strikebreakers? the fellow with brains enough to think instead of shooting?"

"Uh, huh. That's Dick."

"Better and better. Shooting don't get you anywheres. Listen!" He held a cupped fist hard to his ear. "I thought I heard the whistle blow! Go on, now—tell it to me."

"You keep still, then," said Emil indignantly. "You talk too much, Tom. I am the orator of the day—*sabe?* Here's the plan. We all buy stock with money or work. Right smart of money in Chatauqua, and the V Cross T is in it, and all the ranchers and all the mining companies. We do our own grafting and holdup stuff: we let our own contracts to ourselves. Grab and graft on right-of-way is what has always scared money away when it was circling about and ready to light. Old Pat Breen and me, we had claims filed all across San Clemente Gap. We throwed them in the pool, cheap for stock. The railroad company—that's San Clemente, rich man, poor man, beggar man, storekeeper—has laid out a townsite east of the Gap, along where me and the rest of the little cowmen have strung our row of shacks—that's to be the new town of Morningside—everybody in on the ground floor. The stage line throws in their wells."

"That's the idea," said Whitly, catching fire. "A town like San Clemente can do a heap, all pulling together. It's when one half pulls forward and the other pulls back that you don't get anywhere. We'll help, of course—and Datil and Luna. We'll all benefit. Count on me to the last dime. You want to brace the Morgans, too. Old Steelfoot don't

know how much money he has got. What's the matter now, you old fool? What you lookin' down your nose for?"

"Am I telling this story, or are you?" said Emil coldly. "I am? Very well, then, I will proceed. That is all thought out and discounted—and a good deal further. You are elected for one of the directors: you are to direct San Todos. Organize your men and teams for scraping up the road bed: have the stay-at-homes raise grain and alfalfa a-plenty. We want a petition signed by every man-jack of you. Old J. C. and Wildcat, they're both in Santa Fé, squeezing a franchise from the legislature, without any business methods whatever: just a demonstration—no franchise, no votes. And we want your personal pressure on the law-makers—heavy.

"Lone Miller and Billy Murray and another man, they've got a coal mine out beyond San Quentin; they turned it into the railroad company, cheap for stock."

"San Quentin? Why, the railroad will go away north of there—through the Datil pass. Won't it?"

"No sir-ee-bob! The railroad goes mighty near due west from Ridgepole to the head waters of the Gila, saving a hundred miles over the Datil route. It goes through Barnaby Bright Pass, with one short tunnel, two hundred yards, to give a straight shoot into the main cañon above the two big bends. Cañon of Barnaby Bright just needs sweeping out and dusting a little, and there's your ready-made tunnel, that would ha' cost how many millions to make? Yessir. And the fellow that had it grabbed turned the right-of-way in to the general pool, cheap for stock: just about one-tenth of what it was worth. From there west, we'll let Nate Logan manage. We made him first Vice-President and General Manager and Purchasing Agent. He don't know it yet. I'm going to sidle down to the N-8 ranch and tell him about it. Logan's been snooping about out west, around the Arizona line, all summer. Reckon he's been hunting the best way into the headwaters of the Gila. They're expecting him back right soon. He'll be real surprised to find Barnaby Bright grabbed up, and his railroad a-building. After I break the news to him, I'll go on down the range and gather in the Morgans and the Fuentes crowd. We want to make it unanimous."

"Only room in my old fat head for one idea at a time," grumbled Whitly. "I had my mind set on Datil Pass, seeing it was big and wide and easy. Never once thought of using Barnaby Bright. Who grabbed it up?"

"Me," said Emil. "I homesteaded it last spring, before the round-up started. Now, I'll go build me a house, and hold it down till the railroad gets a franchise."

"You old fox! You're the one that got this up."

"No," said Emil. "I didn't. All I had was an idea. Dick, he's got the punch. I day-dreamed around a little, mildly interested and all that. Dick did it.

"He's got everything ciphered out finer than a gnat's tooth. First we run a three-mile spur from Ridgepole up the mountain to where we can cut our own tie-timber, and so will haul all our ties by rail except them first three miles. Across Magdalena plain we throw together the cheapest, dinkiest little road-bed in the world—one straight tangent to San Clemente Gap. Through the Gap we build good. Then a spur up to Pinetop, and our own saw-mill. From then on, lumber and ore to haul out, and rails back; we'll take our time building across Malibu Flat, cutting our own ties on Pinetop; we'll make the road build itself from San Clemente to Barnaby Bright. Logan, or anyone that wants to, can build on west from there. But we're going to keep this link of the road in our own hands. If we get any through freight, all right. If they want to play funny with us, we'll wait. All settled except the name. C. C. and C. is the best we've thought of yet—Cattle, Copper and California."

"Well?" said Whitly.

"Well, what?"

"That's what I'm asking you. What did you want to see me about? It wasn't to spring your home-made railroad on me. You could have told me all that by letter, just as well."

"Better," said Emil.

"Better. No interruptions. Such being the case, let's have it. Been robbin' a bank?"

"Well, then, I'll tell you," said Emil. "But you're to keep it under your hat."

"Don't tell where you don't trust," said Whitly, stiffly.

"Keep it on, Tommy—keep it on! I trust you. But I

want it distinctly understood that you are being trusted. Get that? (Silly old fool, aren't you?)"

Mr. James lowered his voice to add the last remark in a confidential aside: the inference being that he expected the sage and philosophical portion of Mr. Whitly's mind to join in disapproval of such weakness. And Mr. Whitly came up to expectations.

"Guess I am," he agreed meekly and cheerfully. "Look over it this time, will you? All set. Turn your wolf loose. Proceed. Go on."

But Emil hesitated. For once his ready tongue was at a loss for words: his eye wandered about the room and, finding no help there, took counsel with his nose.

"Yes, yes?" prompted Whitly, leaning eagerly, hands on knees. "How thrilling! Root of all evil, I think you said.—Don't wade in, boy. Shut your eyes and jump! Make a splash!"

Emil took the advice and plunged desperately. "You know there was a double hanging in Saragossa last week?"

"Keough and Tait? Yes. Good riddance."

"Tom Whitly, both of those men were innocent! Oh, you needn't stare: it's true. But it is not important. No one knows it but you and me. Walter Keough murdered old Gibson for his roll of steer-money and sent Tait over to get hanged for it. It was Tait who murdered poor old Van and not Keough. Tait told me all about it. 'I got a hanging a-coming to me, and I'd just as lief hang for the wrong man as the right one,' says he to me. 'So I don't make no holler. Keough might get clear if he was standing trial for Gibson. But he can't get clear of murdering his own pardner. He's hung himself. I'm satisfied: let her go as she lays.' Keough lost his nerve; mind unhinged and sagging. He tried to shape up a story, but here was a case where the truth would do no good, and his lies were too steep: no one paid the slightest attention to him, along at the last: he was fair crazy with terror." Again Emil hesitated and groped for words.

"Leading up to say?" prompted Whitly.

"Yes. Tait told me something else, before he died. About . . . the killing of Clay Mundy. And he said you could

tell me where to find a man who could verify his words. There were three men in it. One of them, Hamerick, has never been heard of since. But the third man was a cowboy named Joe Hanson, who used to live here."

Whitly's countenance changed.

"Hanson is dead, Emil. He died a year ago, in Colorado. But Tait told you the truth. I know the story. Hanson's horse fell on him, a while back, and he thought he was dying. He was in dreadful misery. I was sitting up with him and he told me. It seems that Mundy hired these three men——"

"I've heard it once. It is a shameful story. Don't put it in words," said Emil. "And, there is one who must never hear it. It is a story that must die with us two."

Whitly mused a little. "No, you couldn't tell her—considerin'. But isn't it a little rough on the man McGregor? He carries the blame—poor old chap! And only you and me that knows!" The fat old man's voice was low and wistful. "I have felt it laid upon me to tell her. But it wasn't a thing you could write. And then again, I felt that I oughtn't. It is a hard case."

But Emil's glance was high, and Emil's voice rose clear and untroubled. "McGregor wouldn't mind. From what I can learn of the man, it is what he would have wished. He would want to spare her. Why, there are two of us who will never forget him: he has love and honor in his grave: what more could the man want? Don't you fret, Tommy. It's all right—or else this is no fit place for any of us. Sure! Wherever he is, all is well with old Sandy McGregor!"

CHAPTER XL

THE ARBITRATOR

South Well is the N-8 home ranch. It lies on the bare plain, two miles out from the southern heights of the Hueco. Against that background of mountain and broad plain, the buildings and corrals, and even the tall windmill tower, are dwarfed to insignificance; the long house is a dropped domino, the great gateposts are matches, the windmill is a slender pencil against the sky.

Emil James drew rein at the water-pen gate and stared toward the house.

"What the Billy-hell has happened now?" he demanded.

"'Lo, Emil! Fall off!"

"No, I'm goin' right on," said Emil, "but I ask you again, what's that up by the house? I don't seem to remember any trees."

The Mag mule, blindfolded, dragged in a weary round at the sweep of a creaking horse-power, pumping water into the big tank: the windmill was becalmed. Spike cracked his whip at the Mag mule, followed Emil's glance, and grinned sheepishly.

"Oh, them? Why, those infernal boys—some of their doin's. Mis' Logan, she had a hankerin' to see the old place where Nate made his first start in life. She kep' a pesterin' me to bring her out. So, as we was expectin' Nate back most any day, I carried her out from San Clemente—her and the two kids. Got in yesterday. And while I was gone, Tom-Dick-Bob and the Watterson kid, they allowed the place looked pretty bare. So they went up in the hills and put down four of the nicest little cedars they could find, and

dug holes and set 'em up like posts—shade trees, for this day and date only. 'Twasn't such a bad idea, nuther. They look right nice, and she won't never know any different. If Nate don't show up tomorrow, I'll take her on back to town."

"Ya-as," said Emil. "How does John Sayles make out?"

"The kid? First rate," said Spike, heartily. "I'll be right sorry to see him go, and that's a fact."

"Going soon?"

"Right off. Going back with Nate."

"Now, that's too bad. Where is he—up to the house?"

"Up in the hills for a horse-ride with Mis' Logan and the two kids—him and Tom-Dick-Bob. That's five kids in all."

"Me, I lay over then, to see John Sayles. Not but what he'll be back here some day."

"Let's go up to the house and stir up some dinner," said Spike. "Mag, she can be a-pumpin'."

"This new man, Lute Evans, that Wildcat Thompson smuggled in—Crooknose, Steve calls him—why, he seems like a pretty fair average sort of a man," said Spike. "He'll do to take along."

"I only saw him once, but I sure liked his looks," said Emil. "And El Paso thinks well of him. Is holding forth at Fuentes?"

"He was. He's staying with the Morgans now. You and Wildcat are going to have it easier, from this on," said Spike. "Crooknose, he'll take part of the responsibility of runnin' things."

"What has he been up to now?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Jim Webb and the Morgans have moved to their new well under Red Mesa—know that? Yessir: got a gang of Mexicans out from Luna and slapped up a big stone house quicker than you could say Scat. And awhile ago they shoved a big bunch of cattle up to the new well—about two thousand head."

"And the upshot of that," said Emil, "will be trouble."

"Well, I guess yes. I put off down there to head it off. Morgan stuff all drifting up to Barnaby Bright water-holes. Don Timeoteo was one mad old man. Young Tim and the bunch was just bringin' their sheep down from the moun-

tains. They had sharpened up all their old rifles and was fixin' to run them sheep in the country between Barnaby Bright and the new Morgan well—breathin' fire and slaughter. Nobody would listen to a word of reason. So I went on down to the Morgans.

"Well, sir, as I got off my horse, them cussed fools piled onto me, and took my gun, led me up to the house and kept me under herd. Wouldn't let me say a word. They was sure fixin' for war. Fuentes would sheep them out, hey? They'd show Fuentes a thing before morning! Zip! Zowie! They had sent back to Mockingbird for Tank Lane and the two oldest Morgan boys and Bat Wilson: they was waitin' for them to come. Me, Spike Gibson, they was going to tie up hand and foot before they started.—And here comes Mister Crooknose, slouchin' along down the trail, with one leg curled round the horn of the saddle.

"Well, sir, half a dozen guns threw down on him at the gate. He stuck up his hands, and they brought him in."

"'Now, what's the excite?' he says, pleasant, as they hustled him to a chair. 'I come down to give you a friendly tip. Don't seem like you appreciate it. I can show you how to keep the sheep back without any trouble.'

Old Steelfoot is a nice old man and he has a powerful gift of statement. It took him all of ten minutes to explain how he proposed to move the sheep, and what he thought about meddlesome people. I gathered that he maybe meant some of that for me. He's mighty interestin' talker. Jim Webb makes a few remarks, too, but he wasn't in it with the old man.

"Crooknose, he listened, polite and proper: but after awhile he held up his hand. 'Here, I want to say some talk,' he says. 'Somebody stake me to a smoke.' So Webb handed him over the makin's. 'I have a proposition to make that you'll fall right in with, it's that reasonable,' says Crooknose, as he finished curlin' a cig. He patted his vest pockets, brisk. 'Now, where did I put that?' he says. 'Oh, yes!' He stuck the cigarette in mouth; he took off his hat, easy and careless, reached into it, and stuck a little derringer up against Steelfoot's ear. 'Here it is!' says he.

"Nobody moved. He slipped Steelfoot's gun from the

holster and trained it on Webb. 'That will do nicely,' says he, getting Webb's gun and tucking the derringer away. 'I observe with pleasure that you are all gentlemen of intelligence. I am not given to levity, and I am in too deep to draw back. We will now ride up to Fuentes and negotiate a treaty. Mr. Gibson, you may come along as witness.'

"Old Steelfoot found his voice. 'Hold on, here!' he says. 'You've got me and Jim. No dispute about that. Anybody with nerve to hold me up in a roomful of Morgans will go through with the play. So if you have any treaty to spring on us that is even halfway fair, we'll agree. But you'll never take me to Fuentes as a prisoner. I'll die in my tracks first. That part is settled. If you've got a white man's proposition, trot it out.'

" 'Make this your home ranch and the north limit of your range,' says the peacemaker. 'Run a drift fence from Red Mesa out to the low country, twenty miles or so. The Fuentes people will build half. Then you can run your saddle horses north of the drift fence, where the grass is best, letting 'em water here or at Barnaby Bright. But keep your cattle south.'

" 'We'll do that,' said Steelfoot.

" 'All right, then—here's your guns,' says Crooknose—and damn my eyes if he didn't hand them guns over. He sat himself down as cool as Cuffy, and lit that cigarette. The Morgans are all right. They're square. They never thought of playing crooked on him.

" 'Will old Timeteo agree to this?' says Webb. 'Did he send you to make that proposition?'—Crooknose puffs a little before he answers. 'Why no,' he says. 'He didn't. I studied that up myself. But I think he'll agree all right.'

" 'Well, you hike along to Fuentes and put it up to him,' said Steelfoot. 'We'll agree to them terms if he will. And we'll not bother the sheep till you get back.'

" 'You'd better send Gibson, I reckon,' says the peacemaker. 'The old Don don't like me much. He bawled me out this A. M. because I wouldn't go along with his fighting men—fairly showed me the door. That reminds me. They had as nice a little ambuscade laid as ever you saw. If you had got out after the sheep, they'd have wiped you out to the last man. But old Don Timoteo will agree to these

terms, I think: especially as they didn't come from you on the one hand, and also because he didn't have to make the first advances, either. They're my terms, and I think the old gentleman will fall in with 'em.—You see, I've got young Tim staked and hog-tied, out in the brush. I must go see to him, too. I want some grub and water for him. The old man sets a heap of store by young Tim: he'll sign your treaty. Afterwards, I'd like to stick around with you boys awhile, if you don't mind: I don't think they want me at Fuentes now. And I'm just getting over being shot up a lot, so I'm not strong enough to work yet. But I might come in handy as an arbitrator, or something.'

"Well, sir—it worked! They're building the fence now. Crooknose is staying with the Morgans, riding around and getting strong. Old Morgan likes him. So does Bennie. He stands ace-high with her, 'cause Bennie is strong for no more war. They ride together a heap. Can't say that Webb likes him: I think maybe he's settin' the pace for Webb. Blessed are the pacemakers."

"Then you think you'll not be in town by Saturday, Mr. Jones?" asked John Sayles.

"Nope. Going to hurl up a shack on my little old homestead, now. I'll get me a man and a team from Fuentes to help me, and the rest of the outfit, grub and stuff. I won't be in for maybe two weeks."

"Well, good luck, then!" said John Sayles. "By the time you get it I'll have a letter there awaiting for you, from Baltimore."

"Here—hold on!" said Emil. "You've not left this country yet. You're going too fast. That is the lesson for next July."

John Sayles stared at him. "How did you ever happen to pick that up?" he demanded, curiously.

"Eh? Pick what up? Oh, I see! Why, that's from an old song:

'Where has he got to? Tell him not to'!
All of the scholars who hear him, cry.
'That's the lesson for, lesson for, l sson for,

That is the lesson for next July!'

Why? What about it?"

"Nothing. Only it is what they sing in one of the old English schools—Harrow or Eton, I've forgotten which. It seemed so devilish queer to hear it, out here."

"Oh, like that? Well, it's this way: I was not always thus, the savage chief of yet more savage men. My grandsire came from Wilmington, North Carolina, where the family was then considered some pumpkins. So Grandad went to school in England. That's how it happens that I can tell you what school sings that little old song: Harrow."

Mrs. Logan came to the door, with Kinks clinging to her skirt. "But Mr. James," she said, "Nate wrote that he would surely start east next Saturday, and John goes with us. I was in here making Bob wash his face, and I couldn't help hearing."

"You see, ma'am, it's like this," said Emil. "Nate thinks he's going. But San Clemente thinks right well of Nate, him bein' a boy here and all—and they're fixin' up a surprise for him—slight token of esteem and respect. And I judge maybe he'll stay a while longer. I won't spoil it by telling. But, if I was you, ma'am, I'd wait out here and go in with Nate, so you'll be surprised along with him. The boys will show you a good time while you're waiting—won't you, boys?"

"Sure," said Tom—Dick—Bob: and exchanged a guilty glance with John Sayles.

"I'll stay, then, since you advise it," said Mrs. Logan. "Kinks was rebellious at the idea of going, anyway. She wants to see her papa."

"I made a swing for Kinks just now, under the trees," said Emil. "And that reminds me—those trees are sure mighty pretty, but the heat isn't agreein' with 'em. They look droopy. They need a big rain. I hope you'll excuse me for offerin' advice, Mrs. Logan—but if I was you, I'd have the boys tote up some water for them trees, every day. They won't mind. Well, goodby all—I got to be movin'."

CHAPTER XLI

THE WITCH HILLS

Emil James was building a house on his claim by Barnaby Bright, to comply with the very moderate requirements of the homestead law. It was to be a moderate house, therefore, and Emil worked moderately. He was no woodsman; nor was Charlie Stewart, who was helping him. Their hands were little trained to other tools than rope or rifle, but they went at their unaccustomed toil in holiday spirit; if they did not work very hard at it, they at least worked joyfully.

The task had the spice of novelty about it. When they had painfully hacked down a cedar, they felt the same flush and pride of accomplishment that a lumberman might achieve in tying down his first steer.

The best and straightest trees were in the half-mile of rough little hills directly under the cliff, between the new home-site and the old church of Barnaby Bright. In resting spells, the two men looked down at the low slopes and ridges beneath them to see how the railroad should best curve and clamber to reach the spot, close beside the new house, where it should pierce the cliff behind, the last barrier on the long road to the western sea. Once beyond Red Mesa, it was down hill all the way to Yuma—six hundred miles. This was the backbone of the continent, the true dividing place, the parting of the waters; the rain that fell on Red Mesa found its way to two oceans.

Fuentes had been told gently of the new railroad; Fuentes had girded up its loins, rejoicing; had planned great crops for the great market that was to come to its door. Fuentes, at Emil's pointing out, was to try for artesian water; if found, was to reap the benefit picking the best lands. Land is opportunity. It needed no textbook to teach Fuentes that.

Charlie Stewart drove the team. Emil, with the Pussyfoot horse, a rope to the saddlehorn, and a stay-chain to pass around the cedar posts—where a rope would fray out on the sharp rocks—snaked the posts from steeps and hollows to where Charlie could reach them with his wagon.

It was pleasant work. The smell of new-cut cedar, together with spicy tang of bruised herbs, made a thing to be remembered, a thing which stimulated the imagination. Emil saw the far trains come and go, saw the road curve and cling on the ridges below him, saw it make a straight and shining line across the desert.

He looked around at the little cedared hills against the cliff, and saw there a busy gateway town. It was a cheerful thought: Emil sang as he rode back.

"When time was young and the school was new,
(King James had painted it bright and blue),
In sport or study, in grief or joy,
St. Joles was the friend of the lazy boy.
He helped when the lesson at noon was said,
He helped when the Bishop was fast in bed;
For the Bishop of course was master then,
And Bishops get up at the stroke of ten."

He dragged another load of posts to the pile; he looked again at that brave town of pleasant homes, where the shadows of afternoon fell fresh and cool from the great cliff; looked closer, and saw there no home-fire of his own. Yet it was his own homestead: this was clearly unjust. He lifted up his eyes and looked out across the desert to the Witch Hills.

The Witch Hills shimmered and shook back the sun; they rose and sank and wavered, they scattered, they huddled and rushed together, they swirled high to heaven, a portent; they turned themselves to Emil then and reached out, and danced and beckoned and promised. Emil rode back.

"And if ever a lesson provoked a doubt
St. Joles his Lexicon helped it out;
Perhaps it wasn't in page or print,

But it hinted a probable friendly hint;
And often, indeed, if I must confess,
It was like to a sort of a kind of guess."

"There, old Pussyfoot!" said Emil. "This is your last load.—Let's go!"

"No laws of scholarship harsh and quaint
Could ever perplex the useful Saint;
No trouble of mood and gender come
But he settled the rule by the rule of thumb;
You'd toss a penny and surely know
The way the genitive case would go;
For at tails and heads he was clear and true,
And it always turned up one of the two."

He took off the chain, he began coiling up his rope.

"O then King James, in his wrath and ire,
Degraded Saint Joles to Joles Esquire;"—

The song broke short: Emil stood motionless, the rope half-coiled. Below him, on the old road which led in through the doors of Saint Barnaby church, two rode swiftly; Bennie May Morgan and Crooknose Evans.

They were so close to Emil that they might have heard him. They looked into each other's eyes. Once indeed, they looked aside, up the old wagon-road to Fuentes. They did not see Emil, in plain view on the hill above them: they did not see the swift dust-cloud that followed behind, on the new trail from the new Morgan well; that gained on them: a dust-cloud that turned up the pebbly slope, and thinned there, with black specks shaping through—ten of them, twenty—furious horsemen, charging fiercely up the steeps to the pass; the wild Morgans, scarcely two miles behind.—Unseeing, unhearing, the two fugitives rode on; their horse-hoofs clattered in the creek-bed; they spurred through the gateway under the church of Barnaby Bright.

Emil was stone on the hillside.—Boy and man, his eyes had ever sought the far horizons, wondering what lay beyond.

This it was which lay beyond; to which all paths had turned since the first toddling of his baby feet in the dim old gardens of San Antonio. The long-stretching perspective of coming years, dream-haunted, misty, enchanted, all faded now and blurred—then cleared away and left him face to face with the appointed hour. In the mid-dance of pulsing life it struck, that waiting hour: clear and high, above the turmoil of leaping blood, he heard it call, and answered, nothing doubting.

His gun was in camp. He took up his axe and plunged down a steep foot-path under the cliff, through trees and brush. He came to the pass; in the deep, dark shadows, he looked up at the church of Barnaby Bright, the ancient roof and the timeless walls. He closed the gate under the church; he stood with a foot on the lowest stair of the church steps and leaned on his axe, waiting.

A thunder of hoofs beat on his ears: shod feet striking fire from stones, the Morgans whirled into the narrow strait. Webb was first: Emil swung his axe and shouted. The frightened horse slid, swerved and turned back, plunging. A shot went wild in that whirling plunge, an axe gleamed up; part of Webb's hat fluttered to the ground. Steelfoot Morgan reined aside, throwing his horse back to his haunches.

"I have no gun," said Emil mildly. "Jim, you couldn't see that—it's pretty dark here till you get used to it. So I'll excuse you this time."

"What in the name of God——!" roared Steelfoot, but checked at Emil's lifted hand.

"This road is closed for the day," said Emil. "Orders. Mine. Unless you want to shoot an unarmed man. If you do—shoot and be damned!"

Fierce faces gleamed in that dusky place, there was a clamor and crash of wild voices, they pressed forward, the Morgans and their men; a phantasmagoria of sound and motion, quivering, threatening to plunge and over-ride, together and headlong. Emil stood waiting, axe balanced. Three late-comers rode into the cañon and swelled the uproar: one evil face that Emil knew—Travesy: two faces he did not know.

Then, swift as a dream, the babel ceased: that wild crew

fell silent, drew back, turned their horses' heads; they drove the late-comers before them, they rode back down the cañon, passed the bend, vanished!—What Emil did not know was that the church door had opened softly behind him: that Bennie May stood there, and looked down on him.—The dullest Morgan could not mistake what her eyes said as she looked down on this man who held the gate for her. They stayed for no questioning. Webb rode last, slowly: his great black head drooped as he rode. Emil stood amazed. The echoes died away.

"It was Helen Fuentes," said Bennie May, clearly.

The axe dropped with a clatter: Emil turned and saw her.

"The El Paso people were after Mr. Evans," said Bennie May, at the top step. "Billy Murray sent word: he brought Helen here to meet us. I came with Mr. Evans to represent womankind, and to wish her good luck."

Emil looked up at her dumbly. She came down to the next step.

"Not as bridesmaid exactly—but that was the general effect. There's no priest nearer than Luna. They've gone on to be married there. Billy went with them." She came down slowly: one step nearer to him. "Helen wanted a last prayer here, in the church of her fathers."

She floated nearer, nearer; she was on the last step. "Did you see the Witch Hills to-day, Emil? They were never so lovely."

"Bennie!" said Emil hoarsely. He held out his quivering hands.

"Let's go!" said Bennie.

(THE END)

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